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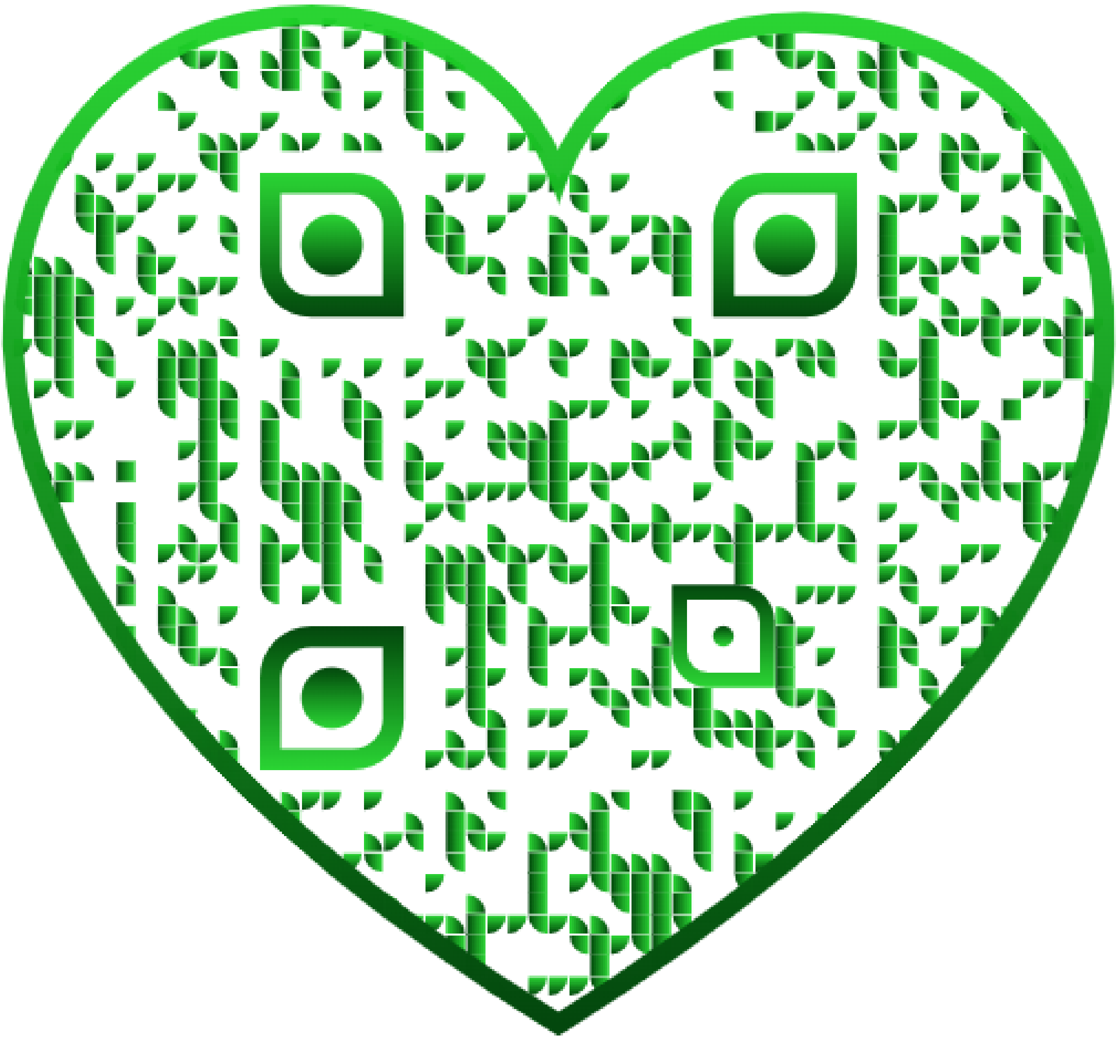

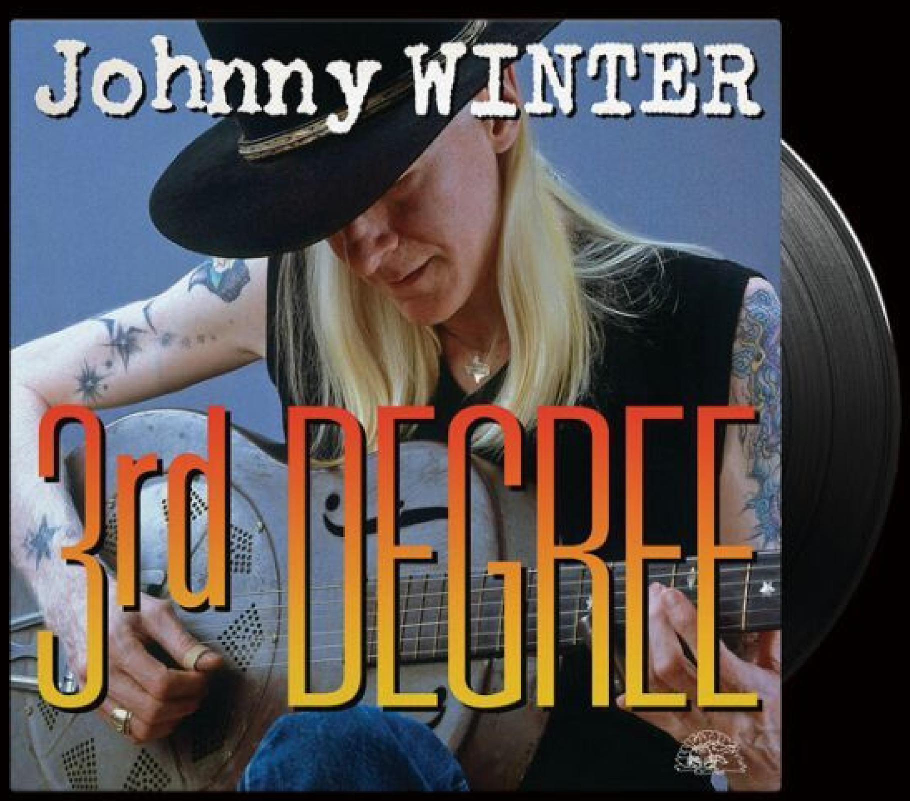

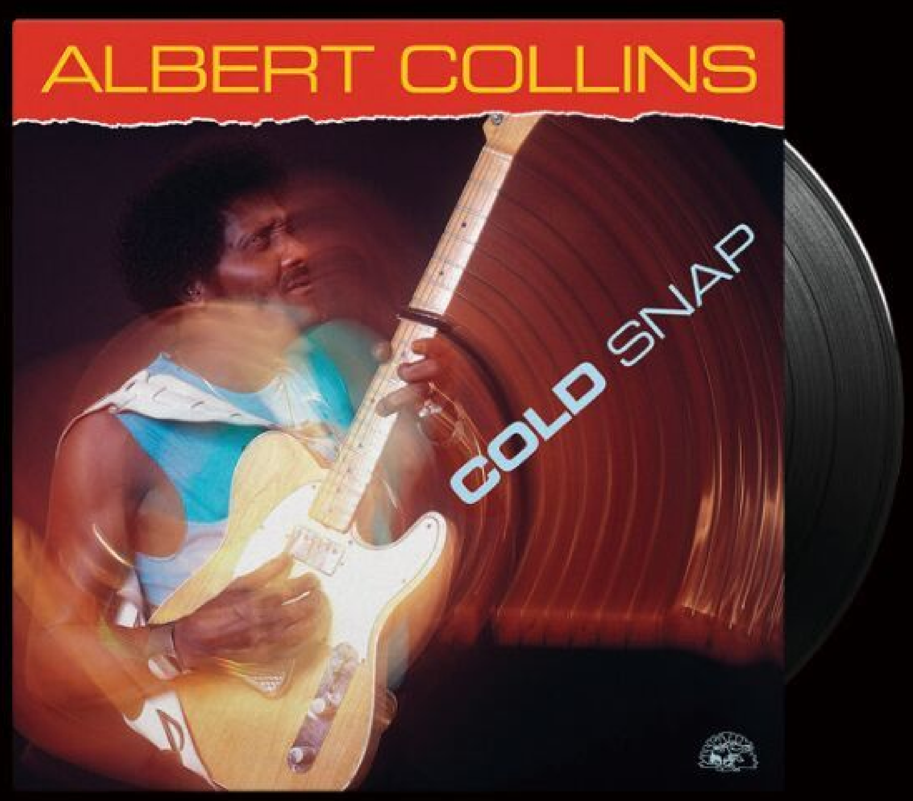

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www.bluesmatters.com/subscribe

Printed by parkcom.co.uk **Distributed by** Warners Distribution Group

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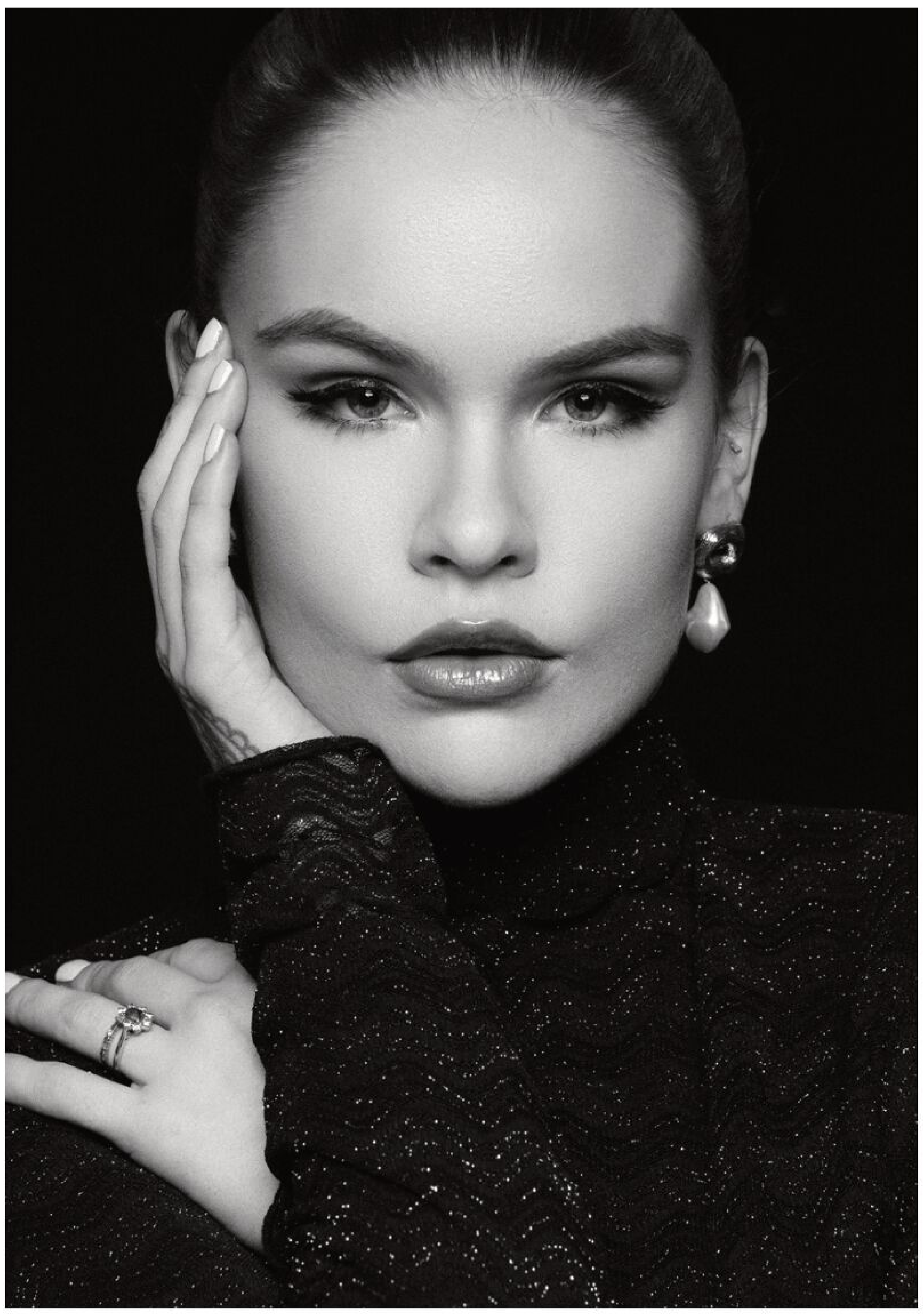

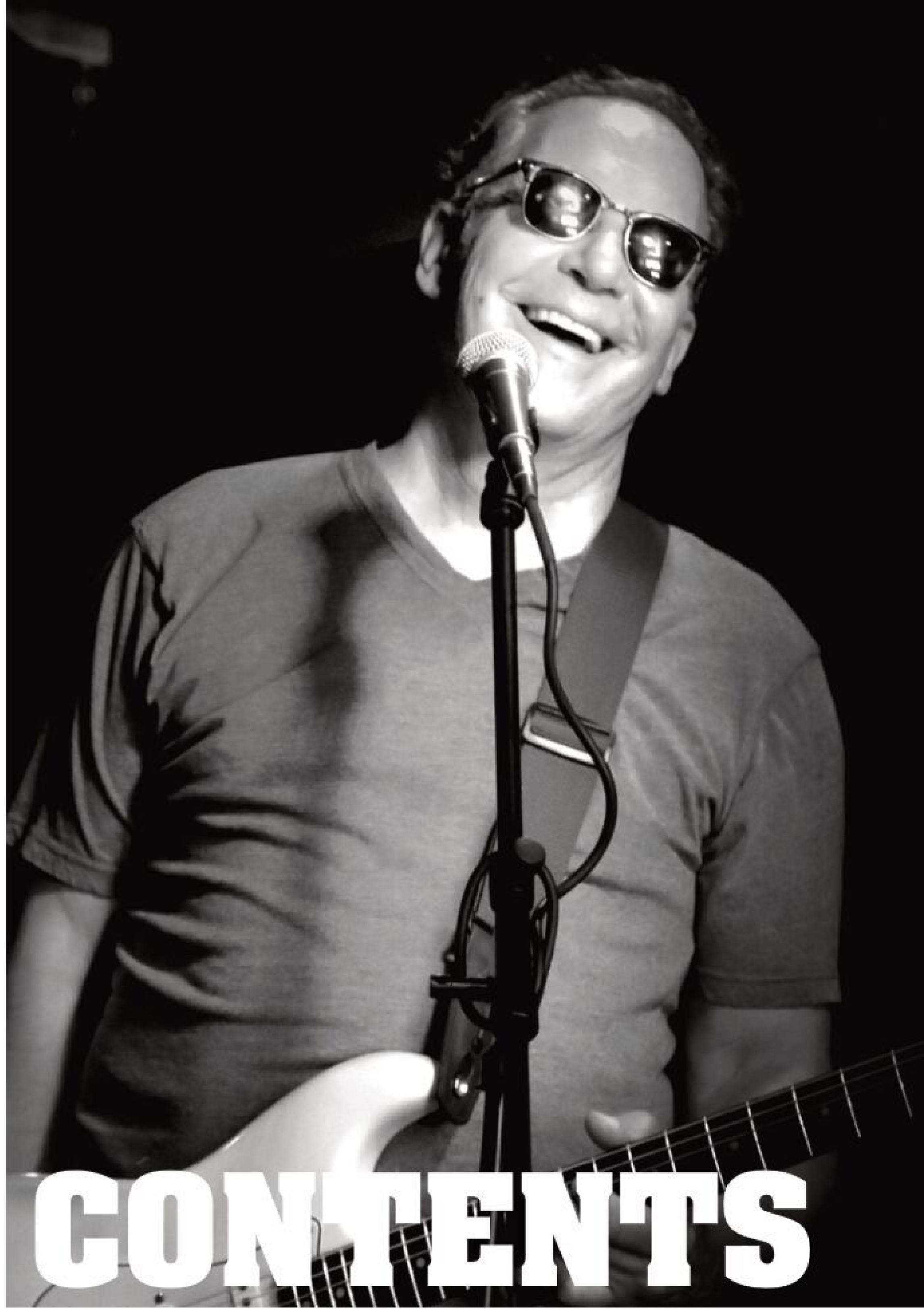

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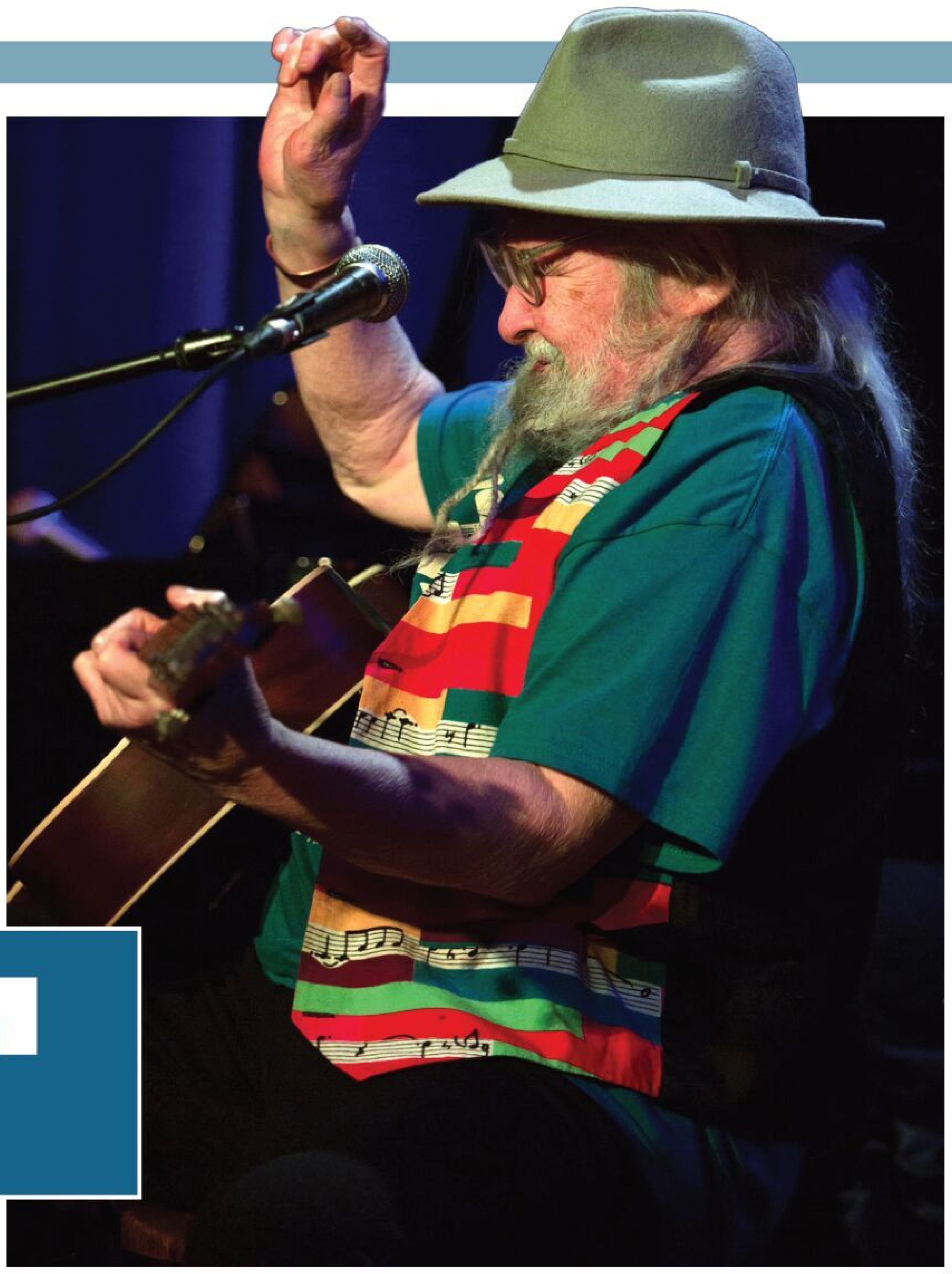
VICTOR BROX

by **Rowland Jones** Images: **William Ellis**



80 NOT OUT

It's June 1970, I'm attending the Bath Festival of Blues and Progressive Music, wearing a purple vest and black loon pants, having paid 25 shillings (£1.25) for the opportunity to see an unbelievable lineup including John Mayall, Santana, Dr John, Frank Zappa, Canned Heat, Jefferson Airplane, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Flock, Steppenwolf, Johnny Winter, and for the first time I see Victor Brox fronting the Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation.

Fast forward 52 years and I'm booked to perform at a lovely gig called Traders in South Manchester. There's also an Open Mic element to the evening; there I see the same Victor Brox performing a song he'd written that same day. At eighty, the man is still doing it. And doing it very well!

Victor has been an important figure not only in the north-west but in the world of blues for a long time. That much I knew. However, a quick glance at his history made me want to know more about this man whose 'played with' list reads like a who's who of blues. And so the story began ...

In the early 50s, Victor was attending school in Manchester, very keen to learn violin. Unfortunately, he wasn't told precisely when lessons would take place, so he'd taken his violin along just in case. He couldn't take part in gym classes because of an injury, but he was forced to attend anyway. Suddenly he heard music in the distance. He was panic stricken, thinking that he might have missed his first lesson. Brox grabbed his instrument and ran in the direction of the music – bursting into a rehearsal of the school's jazz band. Told to sit down, which he did obediently, he listened - very attentively - to the music. By the end of the rehearsal, he was absorbed in the music and asked, 'What was that last tune that you played?' One of the musicians replied 'That's a blues.' The die was cast.

It was quite clear that once Victor had got the blues bug, he was 100% committed to it. He formed his first band at thirteen. At fourteen, he was meeting, listening to and learning from visiting blues legends like Big Bill Broonzy and Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee. Always striving to improve his musical skills, at the age of 20, Victor headed to Barcelona hoping to get advice from trumpeter Bill Coleman. Unfortunately, by the time Victor arrived Coleman had gone to Ibiza, hoping to hook up with Charlie Mingus, who was rumoured to be moving there. So, what does our intrepid musician do? He hitches a lift on the back of a new friend's scooter. Not any friend mind you, but one Joseph Heller -- yes that Joseph Heller of 'Catch 22' fame.

Victor then spent the next couple of years organising happenings in Ibiza, like you do. Oh, and did I mention that his partner at this time was Nico? Yes that Nico - as in Velvet Underground who then mysteriously disappeared before reappearing in Manchester 20 years later asking if he could acquire some smack for her!

That last paragraph will give you just a small idea of what it is like to talk to Victor Brox about his life – stories, anecdotes and the names of significant others tumble from his lips. I knew that Victor Brox had a long and interesting story to tell, but I had no idea how complicated and star-studded his journey through life had been – a life which he describes as a 'series of fortuitous mistakes'.

In 1963, he returned to Manchester and founded the Victor Brox Blues Train with singer Annette Reis who would become Mrs Brox and the mother of his children. The band toured extensively in the UK until Alexis Korner invited Victor to join his band on keyboards, which gradually evolved into a duo. When Alexis' broadcasting career started to overtake his music, Victor was fortuitously (again!) invited to join forces with Aynsley Dunbar who had recently been sacked by John Mayall for playing over long drum solos.

The Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation went on to tour extensively in Europe and the States. It was during this period Victor met and became friends with Jimi Hendrix - an event which took place not at The Speakeasy or The Marquee but rather ignominiously at Watford Gap services: 'I was coming out of the toilet dressed in this weird white suit, he was coming in dressed in this gold braid Hussar's jacket.' Victor explains.

It was the 60's, after all. Of course, I had to ask as to the legendary quote that in Hendrix's opinion the Brox had the best white male blues voice. Victor was very quick to correct me saying that Hendrix said that Victor was 'his favourite blues singer' – a comment which for Victor, implied a lot more than just a great voice – and one of which he is justifiably proud.

Interestingly at this time, it appears that Victor was appreciated much more in the States than the UK. Tina Turner was another big fan, and invited him to a recording session in LA. Once in a New York club, the Retaliation were joined by Jimi Hendrix, Leonard

Cohen, Ritchie Havens and Janis Joplin who then sang a duet with Victor. As you can see, at this point Victor's life was populated by a stellar cast.

After Aynsley Dunbar had gone to join Frank Zappa's band, Victor produced albums for his own label, including one with Champion Jack Dupree. He also played alongside Keith Moon and Richie Blackmore on Screaming Lord Sutch's 'Heavy Friends' album and joined Clapton and Jagger on Dr John's album 'The Sun, Moon, and Herbs.' Impressive, huh?

Then, to cap it all, he was invited to sing the part of Caiaphas, the High Priest, in Jesus Christ Superstar. Although the album was a massive success, he never received any royalties unlike fellow singers Paul Raven (a.k.a. Gary Glitter) and Ian Gillan who were already signed to the record label. So, alas fame but no fortune for Victor. In fact, the only worthwhile royalties Victor received during his long career have been for a song entitled 'Warning' which he wrote for the Aynsley Dunbar Retaliation and was recorded by Black Sabbath on their eponymous first album!

After several hours of chatting, Victor suddenly realises that we have only covered a small section of his life in the Blues. Strangely, though, in some senses this is a reflection of his career – massive early promise resulted in wonderful opportunities and great accolades though since that time he seems to have been 'under the the radar' particularly in the UK. Whereas, in reality, Victor has never stopped writing and performing. During the 80's, he was involved in a project called Main Squeeze which included his wife Annette on vocals, Dick Heckstall-Smith on sax, John O'Leary, founder member of Savoy Brown on harmonica, and Keith Tillman on bass. They recorded a live album at Ronnie Scotts - an album full of energy, with some outstanding performances including Victor's gritty vocals and some blistering guitar solos from former Thin Lizzy guitarist Eric Bell.

Later Victor was involved for some considerable time with Art. 314 a band based in France, who took their name from Article 314 of the French Constitution which referred to the idea that if a crime was committed by a group of people then each and every individual in that group was by definition culpable – a concept that this French proto-punk rock band were not enamoured by.

So that's how the unstoppable Blues man has continued his life. These days performing solo and with his Dream Team consisting of Clive Mellor on harmonica and Bo Lee on bass, as well as guiding daughter Kyla Brox as she continues to carve a career and a name for herself as an award-winning singer.

While lockdown put a temporary hold on live music for many, Victor busied himself with writing his autobiography and is currently finishing the third volume which will apparently conclude the first 20 years of his life! Inevitably though, now things are returning to the 'new normal', Victor is back out there doing what he loves best, performing – 'Playing the blues has taken me round the world. It's given me a lifetime of doing something satisfying and making wonderful friends.'

At the end of our conversation, I ask Victor about the new song I heard him perform a few weeks ago. He replied: 'I woke in the middle of the night wrote thirteen verses then went back to sleep.'
Good on you, Victor – keep on doing it, my friend.

Rowland Jones is a singer/songwriter and guitarist based in South Manchester. His album 'Rowland Jones - Live' (2020) was nominated in the Best Live CD category in The 2021 Independent Blues Awards. His latest album 'Live@Oswestry' (2022) features his band - 'Rowland Jones & The Moveable Feast' with Bo Lee on bass, and Iain Mellor on percussion.
Www.rowlandjonesmusic.com

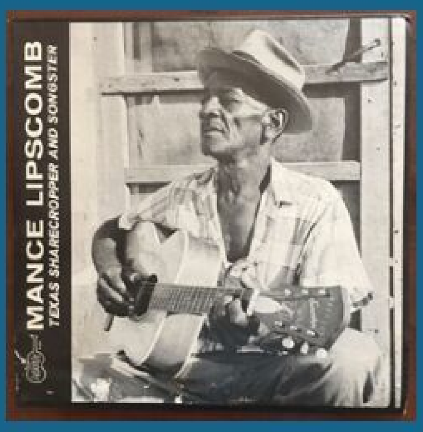
MY TOP 3 BLUES ALBUMS

DAVY KNOWLES

1) JOHN MAYALL & THE BLUESBREAKERS W/ ERIC CLAPTON 'BEANO ALBUM'

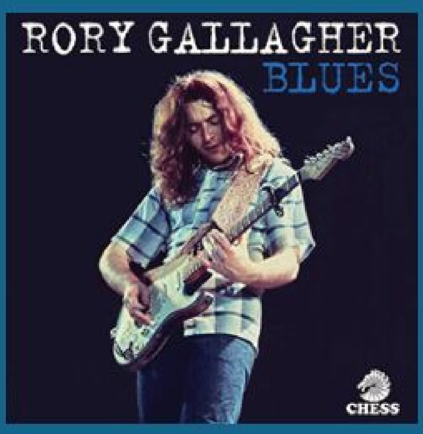
This was my introduction to the blues. I had never heard anything so pent up and fired with emotion before. From John Mayall's haunting and weeping vocals to Clapton's stuttering and masterful solo on 'Have You Heard' (my favourite guitar moment on the record)… this served as an education to so many. I think also it sparked the historian in me, and sent me researching where this music came from – the first track is an Otis Rush song, the second a Freddie King. There are Ray Charles songs, Robert Johnson songs… Reading the liner notes to this album was the foundation for my musical education in this genre.

2) MANCE LIPSCOMB – TEXAS SHARECROPPER AND SONGSTER



Mance Lipscomb is such a criminally underrated artist. This record is full of really intelligent and insightful writing, He had such a unique style, and I think what I love most about him, is that this isn't about the guitar, or even the blues. It just seems to be a wonderful narrative that pours out of him. Stand out track to me is 'Ain't it Hard'. It meanders between major and minor, and is just a great example of what a fabulous writer Mr. Lipscomb was.

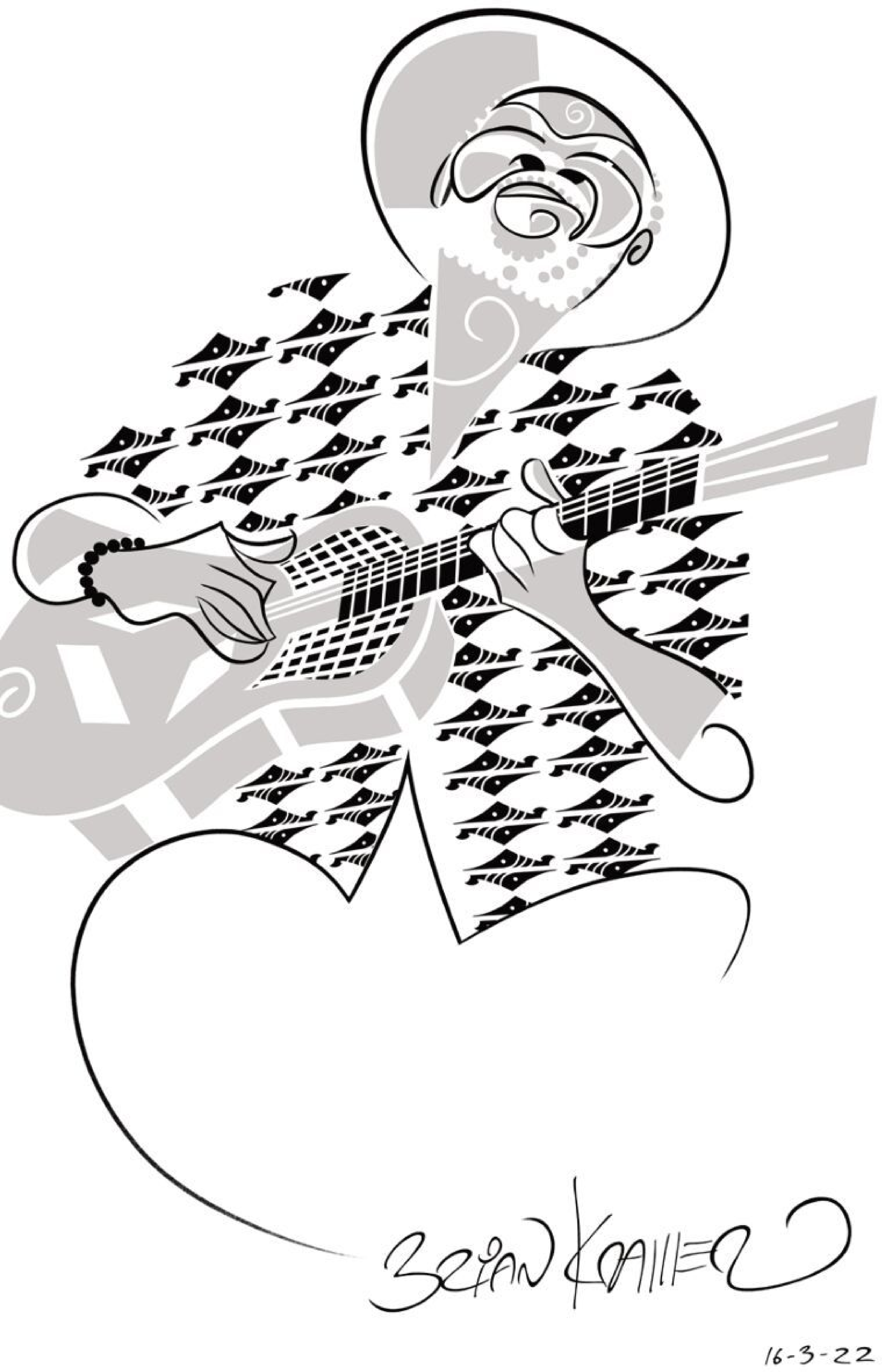
3) RORY GALLAGHER – 'BLUES'



I really could have picked any album of Rory's for this, I'm such a fan! But this excellent compilation put out a couple of years ago really shows how deep Rory's knowledge went, and how versatile he was in performing so many different styles. From the almost ragtime of Blind Boy Fuller, to more raucous screaming electric numbers. Also worth noting for me, as a fellow celt, is Rory's own take on the blues – 'Million Miles Away' which for me perfectly marries his Irish roots and his obvious love of Blues music.

THE ILLUSTRATED BLUES

BY BRIAN KRAMER



As a young man, Clair Frederiks Jr. vividly saw one of the seven wonders of the world in a dream and awoke as Taj Mahal.

Where do I even start with Taj? World-Bluesman is usually the term that rolls most easily for me, from The Rising Suns (with Ry Cooder) in the 60's to collaborations with West African kora virtuoso, Toumani Diabate to just about every icon and legend from blues to rock to soul and beyond, he's grooved with them all.

My introduction to Taj as a young teen, absorbing everything I could about roots and blues, was an introduction to the positive, uplifting attributes of the blues. That the energy and intention could indeed be focused and amplified to lift people up and heal. He uses the identifiable tools of the trade; steel bodied National guitars, acoustics, semi-hollow bodied electrics (harps, banjos, etc.), but combines the sounds and nuances of these "blues tools" with an other-worldly stature.

As I was riding around NYC in the 70's, on my bicycle, delivering packages, through my Walkman tape player and headphones I first entered his world and mix of resonator guitars and electric, complex rhythms with easy grooves, layered cultures joining hands, and the deep, deep blues. I was hooked!

I took in these uplifting values in and knew they needed to be explored. That the blues did indeed have may shades that should be tapped, not just the lower side of the human condition and all its struggles, but the joys, the mysteries, the wonder, the optimism. Years later I would first meet Taj at a Blues Festival in Philly and talk to him about recording something. He was very approachable and forthcoming. After moving to Sweden in the 90's, a dream came true and I was booked to open a series of show for Taj with his Hawaiian crew; The Hula Blues Band and the conversation continued.

In 2007 I was booked to soon play a culture festival in South Africa and do some workshops in the township. I had just recently met and played with another of my huge idols Toumani Diabate and Taj was back in Sweden and I got the call to open some of his shows again. I had a song that was inspired by my meeting Toumani; Cross Boundaries, and I asked Taj if he would record it with me for a limited issue release/CD in South Africa that would include collaborations with some of the local musicians there. He agreed, and suddenly I found myself sitting next to Taj in a small studio, guitar in hand!
This studio session concluded a day off and included being on a small boat with him and just the tour arranger for five hours on a lake fishing. Fishing with the man who wrote 'Bet you're goin' fishing all of the time, I'm a goin' fishin' too….'. A truly unforgettable and unique, dream-like experience to suddenly find myself in these scenarios; that kid from Brooklyn just trying to joyfully wrap his existence around this whole blues thing.

I had my drawing pad with me then, and sketched Taj, relaxing, enjoying the simple pleasures on that boat and here is my more recent illustration of him as he is now, trying to capture his uplifting essence again.

Taj has been on a steady stream, traveling the world for six decades, with no dip in his inspiration or his ability to breath new, positive life into the blues. If there is a lesson here, it is of the freedom of infinite possibilities with the strength of intention and imagination. And a strong, solid hold on the roots.

I also had the distinct pleasure and honor to have Taj's attention for an in-depth, feature interview I did with him for these pages of Blues Matters Magazine; Feb/March issue 64. So much more I can write!

NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...

THE HITMAN BLUES BAND TO HIT THE ROAD FOR UK TOUR

IMAGE: Laurence Harvey

New York City's Hitman Blues Band have recently been named UK Blues Awards 2022 International Blues Artist Of The Year Finalist, and they are following on from their hugely successful 2021 UK tour and their highly acclaimed recent album release 'Not My Circus, Not My Monkey, with a 14 date UK tour in July. The band are fronted by vocalist and guitarist Russell 'Hitman' Alexander and once again feature The New York City Horns.

The dates are; 14 July Farnham Maltings Surrey, 15 Birmingham Jazz Festival, 16 Bear Club Luton, 17 The Tropic Ruislip, 19 TNMC Coulsdon, 20 Bullingdon Oxford, 22 Birmingham Jazz Festival, 23 Livestock Festival Enfield, 24 Hope Tavern Festival, 26 Red Arrow Music Club Ramsgate, 27 Half Moon Putney, 28 Blues Bar Tring, 29 The Factory Live, Worthing and 31 The Concorde Club, Eastleigh.

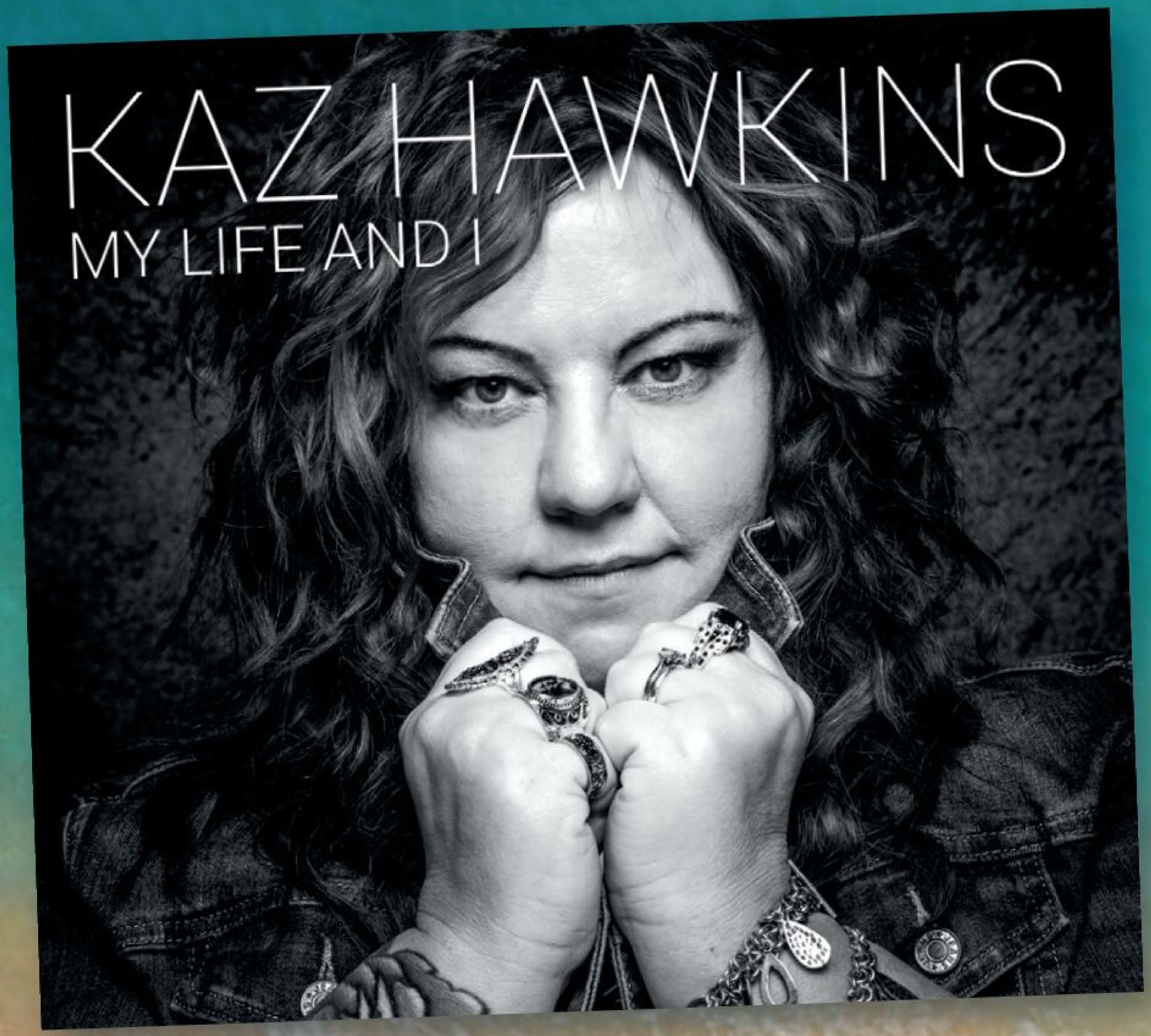
For more information on tour dates, ticket links and to buy music visit: www.hitmanbluesband.com

LONG ROAD HOME FOR NEW BAND

Long Road Home is the new band formed by Storm Warning's bassist Derek White and keyboard player Ian Salisbury, along with guitarist Steve Summers and vocalist Mike Sebbage, both from recording project Rien de Faire. Drummer Dave Norman completes the line up.

The band have their roots firmly planted in the blues rock genre and writing has begun for the band's debut album. Their first single, the self-titled track Long Road Home, is due for release in May 2022 ahead of their debut appearance at The Cambridge Rock Festival on 18th June followed by a series of UK gigs.

The Summer of Dixiefrog



CD: already released

LP: Release Summer 2022

Including hit singles: "Because You Love Me»", "One More Fight (Lipstick & Cocaine)", "Surviving"

2CD: Release May 12th including "Live in Europe" (unpublished Live recording)

2LP: Release Summer 2022

CD: Release June 3rd

LP: Release Summer 2022

Feat. Maori Diva Delaney Ututaonga

CD: Release July 8th

LP: Release Summer 2022

Produced by Duke Robillard

Including "Brothers From Another Mother" feat. Larry McCray

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MY TOP 5 BLUES SONGS

THE COLD STARES

1) ROBERT JOHNSON – "RAMBLIN' ON MY MIND"

I heard this album I think when I was 15 or 16 years old and I couldn't believe how magical and honest it was. The level of guitar playing, and the uniqueness of how Robert played. The lyrics, and the honestly in Johnson's voice that makes you believe that beautiful dark poetry is coming directly from his soul.

2) WILLIE JOHNSON – "YOU'LL NEED SOMEBODY ON YOUR BOND"

Blind Willie Johnson has one of the most tragic stories of anything you will ever read, and despite that you find this incredible music that revolves around faith and hope wrapped up in a very traditional Delta blues styling. Lyrically amazing, honest, and I immediately get transported every time I hear something from this record. It is one of my life's ambitions to turn more people on to Willie Johnson, share his story and keep these songs alive. They are a direct line to what makes the hair stand up on my neck.

3) THE DELTA BLUES OF SON HOUSE – "DEATH LETTER BLUES"

Just so real, so honest. I love the contrast and contradictions in the lyrics and Son's life that all equal the real human experience. I love that the vocals and songs are not overcome with fancy guitar playing and unneeded instrumentation. It's mean, beautiful, honest and as close to the root of real American music as I think you can find.

4) ELMORE JAMES – "LOOK ON YONDER WALL"

That slide, that voice. What else can I say. One of my vocal heroes along with Boyd Rivers. I am enamored with the recordings, the microphone capture, and Elmore's performance. This is what I put on when I need a kick in the ass, and something I always reference when doing vocals. 10 out of 10 to me.

5) MUDDY WATERS – "I CAN'T BE SATISFIED"

I mean come on, it's Muddy. Just an amazing album, absolute legend and the godfather of electric blues. I love Muddy's style, his confidence without being cocky. I love that these records are not overplayed instrumentation wise. This to me is American music, Muddy is an American icon, and one of the reasons I'm proud to be from here and play American music. There will never be another like Muddy, and there will never be recordings like this again.

RECORD

SON OF DAVE

CALL ME A CAB

To listen to a vinyl album, LP, or whatever you want to refer to it as is one of life's pleasures. Son Of Dave has recorded an album of songs that make me immediately think that this is part of a personal story told through song. You may argue that most albums are, not always. The titles of the songs are in fact, the giveaway. This only becomes apparent as you start listening, and immerse yourself into the world of Son Of Dave. Gimmie A Doctor is the opening track on Side A. With an almost restrained start with great harmonica, you get the feeling that at any given time, this song will pin you to the wall. It doesn't, what it does do is string you along with the tempo, growling vocals, competing with masterful horns. This is not an out-and-out blues album per se, what you get is a gumbo. A melting pot of blues, jazz, reggae, and swing. That is basically what the entire album is. The mix of all these genres combining and competing against one another helps the pot to bubble away nicely. This becomes more acute on the track, Don't You Know Who I Am. Son Of Dave has a quirky distinction in his vocal delivery and on this track, the lean toward blues/jazz comes to the surface. This is for me the beauty of vinyl. Now you may say that this would sound exactly the same if it were played on a CD, I beg to differ. There is a warm comforting feeling that one gets from a vinyl record. I swear that this album would still be great via a CD, but the magic touch comes from an LP. In The Night is an up-tempo tune with fiery lyrics and wonderful backing vocals bumping against the almost orchestral swing mood of the band. I'm beginning to love this album more and more with each passing moment. Side B opens with, I Don't Wanna Go To School Anymore, which reinstates my earlier belief that this album is a personal story from Son Of Dave. What I really like about this album is the warm glow, the come here and sit with me type of feeling. Old Bill's Barroom leaves nothing whatsoever to the imagination. A pub/barroom of days gone by, beer, whiskey, perhaps an old stand-up piano in the corner, ashtrays, and smoke swirling around the room like it's just been released from a magic lantern. Each title gives you all the information that you need about the upcoming song, this is not an album of songs with a title that's just been made up, this is an album of songs laying out the story that follows right there in the title. 72 tempo, anyone feel that's too fast or slow, what a fantastic introduction to count in the band. I Don't Care Anymore then proceeds to tell a tale that you are already expecting. Dark and broody, but with a hint of tongue-in-cheek about it. The final track, Don't Like To Say Farewell, starts with an eerie harmonica and vocals of a similar ilk. The introduction leads to the pretext which enables the piece of the jigsaw to fit perfectly within the cover of the book. A play on words, but listen to this album, and let the story unfold. You'll be glad that you did.

STEPHEN HARRISON

ROUND-UP

CLIMAX BLUES BAND
HANDS OF TIME

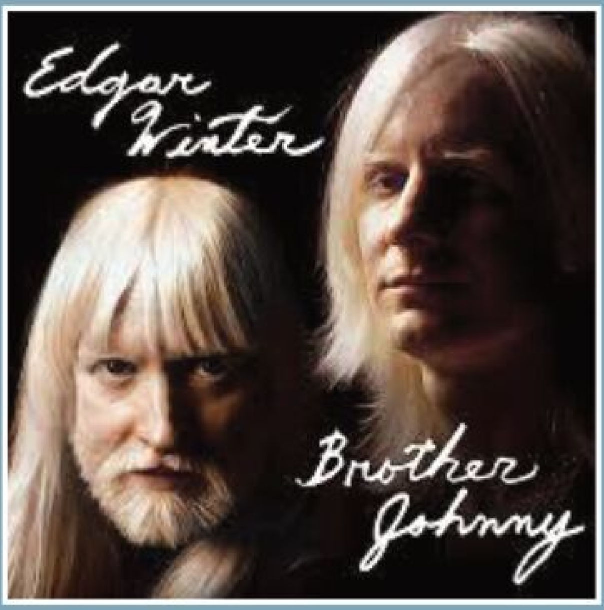
Back in 1968 the then 'Climax Chicago Blues Band' recorded their first album. Fast forward 51 years, Hands Of Time became their latest release. The personnel has changed a few times during those 50 years as with many bands that have been performing for the same amount of time. I first heard the album upon its release in 2019 on a CD format. To say that I was impressed is an understatement. The current line-up has produced a phenomenal piece of work in every aspect. In 2021 it was decided that a vinyl version of the album would be made available so this gave me another chance to review Hands Of Time in my favourite format, vinyl. Side (1) track one, how nice it is to write that, kicks off with Ain't That A Kick In The Head. Chris Aldridge (saxes) and vocalist, Graham Dee combine so well bringing in the rest of the band. As opening tracks go, this is a belter. The soulful side of the Climax Blues band is as much a part of the band as the blues history. Lyrically, I think the band has evolved even more with this album. Straight Down The Middle, highlights the soul of the band so well. Once again Chris Aldridge plays beautiful sax and George Glover (keys) elevates the song to another level. What I have always admired about this band is they never rest on their laurels musically. It would be easy, as aband that has been playing for over five decades, to just go through the motions.
Not a chance of that here. With some albums, you do get the occasional filler, Hands Of Time is not one of those albums. What's Your Name carries on seamlessly, pounding out sweet soul, and blues with effortless abandon. Lester Hunt,(Guitars) is, in my humble opinion, one of the greatest guitarists I've ever had the pleasure of seeing and hearing. A bold statement, but a true statement. What he brings to the band is almost indescribable, but if you are a musician, you'll know exactly what I mean. Flood Of Emotion closes side one, and oh my, does it close it so well. This is a ballad like no other. The title describes exactly how I feel every time that I hear this tune. Goosebumps as I'm writing this right now just thinking about it.
Side (2) track one, opens with 17th Street Canal. Graham's dark, brooding vocals and the sax of Chris Aldridge combine so well. The song threatens to build slowly, then pulls back, as if giving you time to breathe, then off it goes again. The title track, Hands Of Time, is so easy on the ears, sweet, and peachy. The Cat is funky, catchy, and such a brilliant song. These cats are as cool as they come, yes, it's very cool for cats, is this album. Wrong Time closes what is, a fabulous album. No two ways about it, Climax Blues Band ars still as relative today as they were over fifty years ago. If I had to pick one stand-out track on the album, believe me, that is almost impossible, it would have to be Wrong Time. I eagerly await the next album from this amazing band. It can't come a moment too soon.

STEPHEN HARRISON

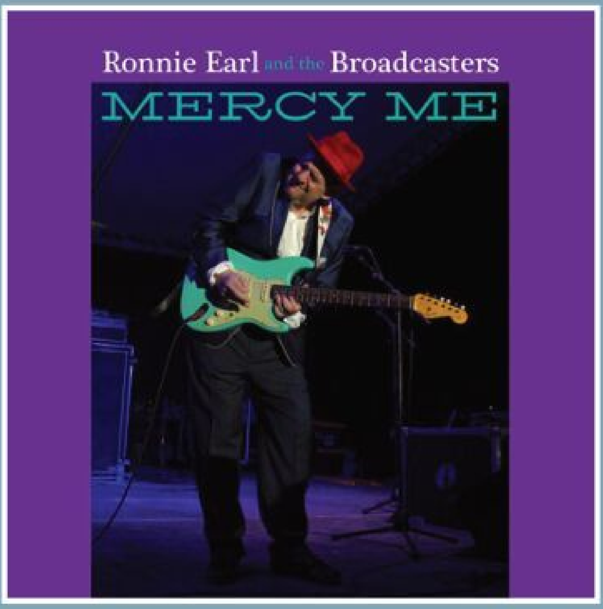
ALSO LOOK OUT FOR:

DANA FUCHS
BORROWED TIME

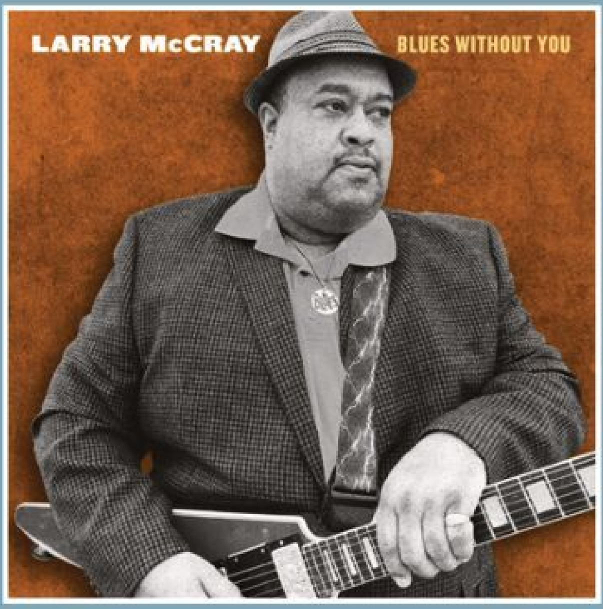
ROBIN TROWER
NO MORE WORLDS
TO CONQUER



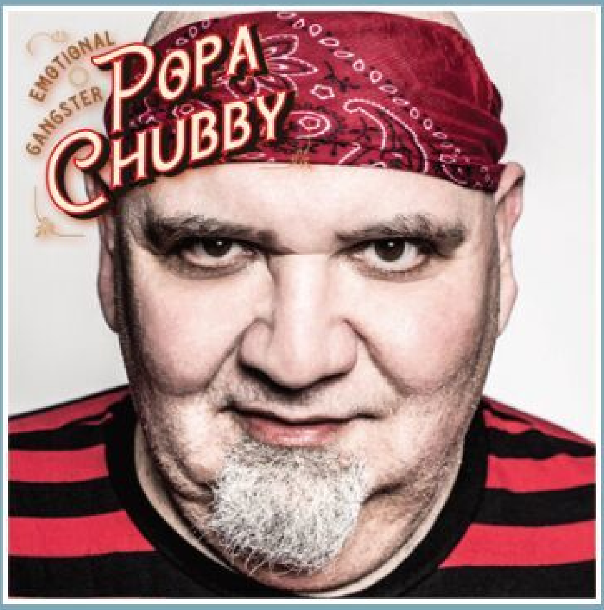
EDGAR WINTER
BROTHER JOHNNY



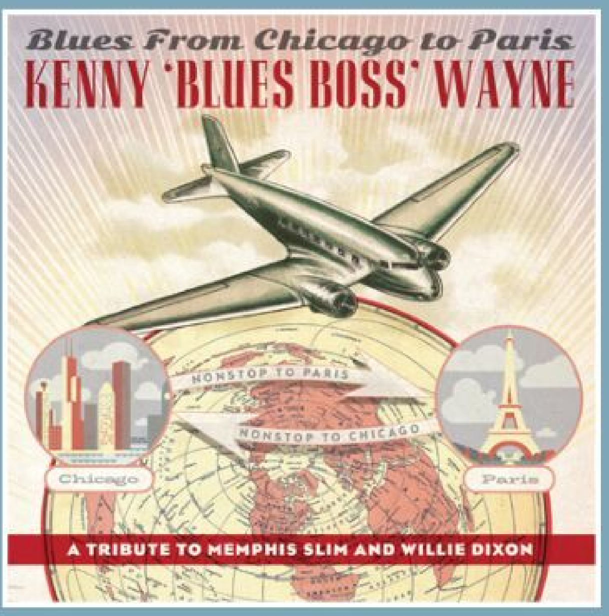
RONNIE EARL AND
THE BROADCASTERS
MERCY ME



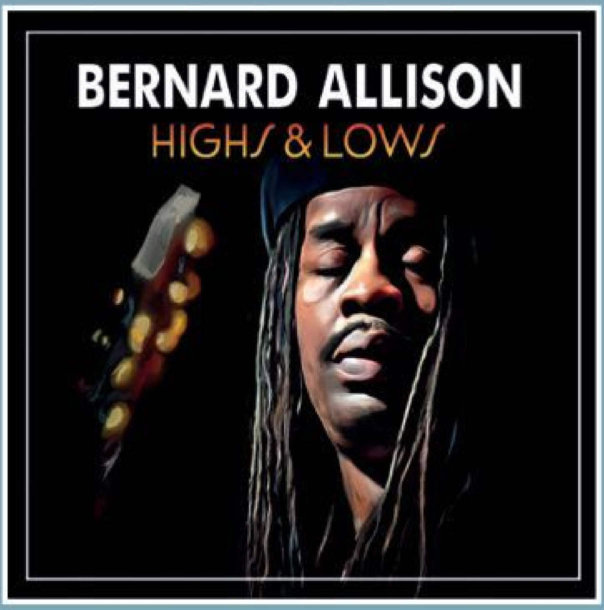
LARRY MCCRAY
BLUES WITHOUT YOU



POPA CHUBBY
EMOTIONAL GANGSTER



KENNY WAYNE
BLUES FROM
CHICAGO TO PARIS



BERNARD ALLISON
HIGHS & LOWS

JOHN MAYALL
THE SUN IS
SHINING DOWN

KEB' MO'
GOOD TO BE...

VIRTUAL BLUES

Words and Photos by Adam Kennedy

Presented here in the latest instalment of Virtual Blues are some of the blues artists that have caught our attention around the world during recent weeks and months. All images were captured remotely - the artists being in a completely different location to the photographer.

DANA FUCHS

New York, NY

US-based singer/songwriter Dana Fuchs recently released her new studio album 'Borrowed Time' via Ruf Records. Of course, Dana is a versatile artist who can grapple with soul, blues, and rock with ease. The New York native's latest offering references her southern rock upbringing whilst recollecting her formative years living in Wildwood, Florida. Living in the Deep South, Dana was brought up on a staple diet of soul interspersed with classic rock from greats of the genre such as The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin and the mighty Lynyrd Skynyrd. With her latest offering,

Dana pays homage to the music of the South. Dana's recent experiences fed into the soulful songstresses' new album. "Over the past two years, most people have realized there's no going back to normal. And really, do we want to? I went back to school and had a baby during the pandemic, so I hope I'm coming from a greater place of wisdom and empathy when I create music now. It was time to get out of myself and deliver songs from another person's viewpoint.

We're all on this planet together, after all, living on borrowed time," explains Dana. "This marks the beginning of Chapter 2, in music as well as in life," says Fuchs. "I'm going out into the world and writing about the people who share it with me. My own story is always going to be in there, too, but this is the first album where other people's stories are informing my own emotions."

'Borrowed Time' by Dana Fuchs is out now via Ruf Records.

LEILANI KILGORE

Nashville, TN

Nashville-based blues/rocker Leilani Kilgore has recently been in the studio working on new material. Kilgore closed out 2021 with the release of her fiery number "I'm Gonna Leave You". Subsequently, Leilani got the New Year underway by opening for Buddy Guy during his annual residency in Chicago. Furthermore, the talented guitar slinger was granted the privilege of sitting in with the living legend during his set. Leilani Kilgore will be releasing her dazzling new single, Diamond Shine, on June 2nd. The artist is presently touring the US; for further details and ticket information, please visit https://leilani-kilgore.com/events.

LIZ BARAK

Nashville, TN

One of the most interesting collaborations to come out of the lockdown era was the Liz Barak Project. This is a body of work which brought together musicians under the spirit of empowering women through music world-wide. The project produced nine recordings and included over fifty female musicians around the world. The list of contributors included prominent names from the blues genre such as Erja Lyytinen and Eliana Cargnelutti, to name but a few. Subsequently, the album was accompanied by a novel which was also penned by Barak titled Ballad of the North Wind. The next instalment of Barak's project will see the artist work on materials by The Beatles. The first track to come from these sessions will be a soft ballad version of the classic Hard Day's Night. When Liz is not working on her music, she is also producing an up and coming female artist. With a return to live music, Liz has also returned to performing in her homeland. The images presented on the pages of Blues Matters here were taken during a recent photo session in the historic city of Haifa in Israel. For further details about Liz Barak and her groundbreaking project, please visit https://www.lizbaraksproject.com/.

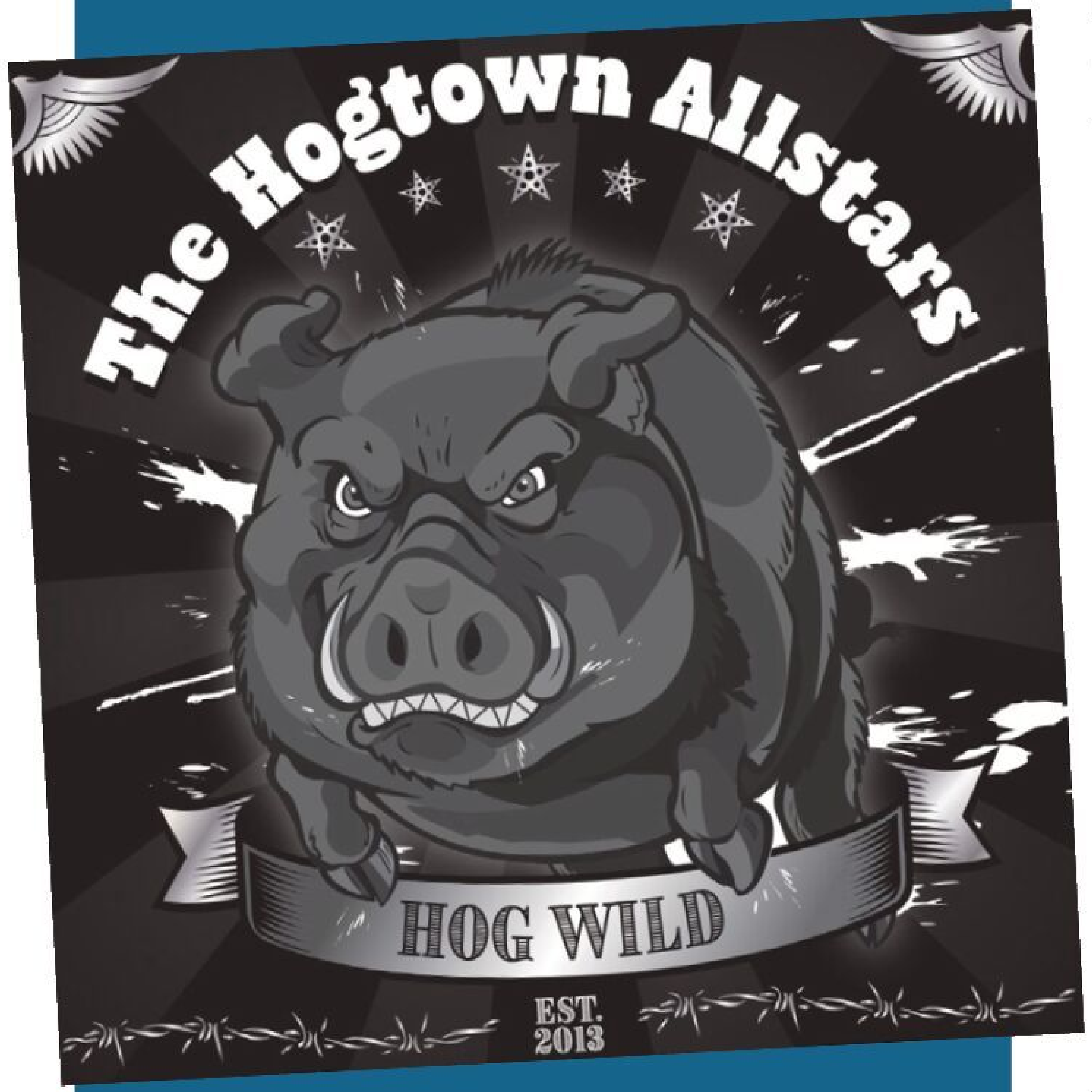
MICKE BJÖRKLÖF

Kauhava, Finland

Whilst the UK had a relatively mild start to the year weather-wise, the same can't be said about Finland, where heavy snow seemed like the norm. Thankfully, during this photo session with Micke at his home studio, the artist was able to stay warm indoors whilst the versatile multi-instrumentalist showed us his setup. This included his guitars, vintage drum set and artillery of harmonicas. Micke Björklöf and Blue Strip, recently released their excellent new album 'Whole 'Nutha Thang' via Ruf Records to much praise from the music press. The group are presently celebrating 30 years of touring with an extensive run of dates across Europe. For further details, please visit https://www.mickebjorklof.com/.

NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...

TORONTO'S ORIGINAL NICKNAME MAKES A COMEBACK WITH THE HOGTOWN ALLSTARS



A new band of multi-award-winning not-so-new blues players are set to make their musical mark: The Hogtown Allstars will release their debut album, Hog Wild, this May 6th, 2022 via Stony Plain Records.

Featuring eight new all-original songs, and two covers, Hog Wild was recorded throughout 2021 once the group nailed their first challenge: coordinating everyone's schedule to hit the studio. It's the first release for the undeniable supergroup that first started in 2013 as a collaborative, creative outlet for Toronto-based musicians dedicated to the genre.

As for 'Allstars,' they come by the moniker honestly; built with some of the most dynamic and experienced players on the global blues scene, the 7-piece adds up to Downchild Blues Band alum Chuck Jackson, Pat Carey, Gary Kendall, Jim Casson, and Tyler Yarema alongside Maple Blues Band alums Teddy Leonard and Howard Moore.

Their collective shelves are lined with more than 20+ Maple Blues Awards, five JUNO Awards, two Lifetime Achievement Awards, and countless International blues and jazz music awards.

The Hogtown Allstars' debut album Hog Wild is available now via Stony Plain Records.

stonyplainrecords.com/hogtownallstars

ETHEL WATERS –

PHENOMENAL BLUES WOMEN

By **Dani Wilde...**

I love strong women. I admire women who lead the way, opening doors for other women to follow in their footsteps. Ethel Waters is without any doubt one of those remarkable women; a true role model who forged her own path from neglect and poverty to success and independence.

In 1920 Mamie Smith recorded and released Crazy Blues for Okeh Records and it quickly became the first hit blues recording. In the wake of its success, record labels rushed to sign up other popular blues women on the tent show and Vaudeville theatre touring circuit. These blues women included Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith and Ida Cox. Only two of the 1920's Blues Women were able to successfully cross over to singing pop music in the 1930's and these women were Alberta Hunter, who had great success in Europe, and Ethel Waters.

African-American Blues and Jazz artist Ethel Waters was born in 1896 in Chester, Pennsylvania, following the rape of her young Mother by a much older man. Waters was raised in poverty by her mother and grandmother.

'In her whole life Mom never earned more than five or six dollars a week. Being without a husband, it was hard for her to find any place at all for us to live.' Waters had to grow up fast: 'I was never a child,' she would say, 'I was never cuddled or liked or understood by my family.' At the age of 13, Waters was married off to an abusive husband. To make ends meet she worked as a maid.

Music was Waters only escape from a very tough childhood. She had a beautiful, emotive voice with a deep vibrato that turned heads. Having sung in the school choir and won local talent shows, at the age of 17 she began to take her music more seriously performing at clubs and theatres in Baltimore and Philadelphia. Due to her tall and slim stature in her early career, she was nicknamed Sweet Mama String Bean.

By 1917, Waters had left her husband and moved to New York City where she quickly built up a reputation as a talented and versatile vocalist. Within a year of Mamie Smith's Crazy Blues being released, Waters made her own recording debut, making her the fifth black woman ever to cut a record. Her debut was for a very small jazz label called Cardinal records, but it helped build her profile and she was soon scouted by Black Swan, the first significant label to be owned by African-Americans.

Waters first release for the label was Down Home Blues and it sold over 100,000 copies. From 1921 to 1923, she was Black Swan's most popular artist, and her contract made her the highest paid black recording artist. At this time, Waters was in a romantic relationship with dancer Ethel Williams. On stage the pair were dubbed 'The Two Ethels,' and they lived together in Harlem.

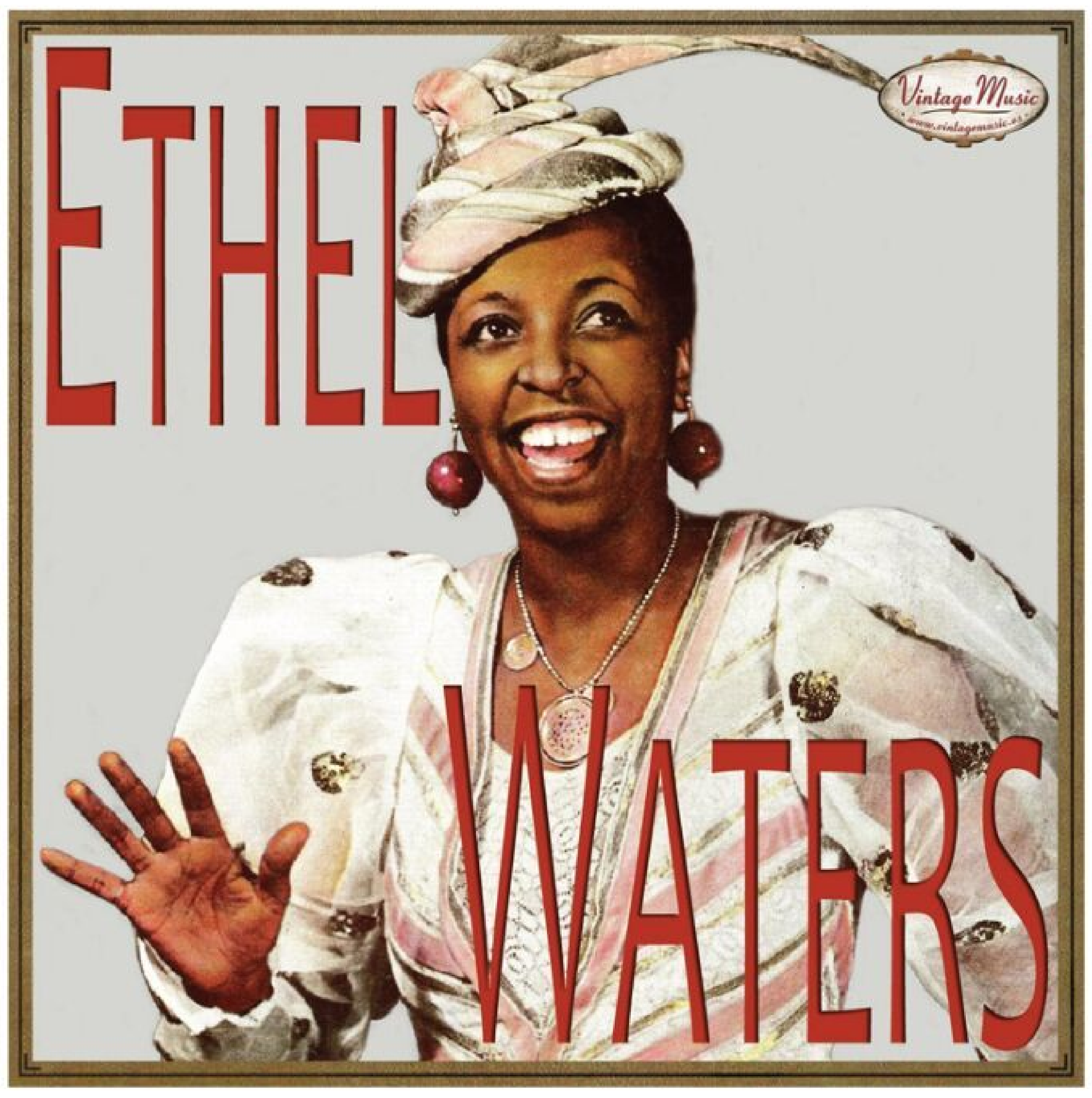
In 1924 Paramount bought out Black Swan and Waters stayed with them until signing with Columbia Records in 1925. Bessie Smith was signed to Columbia at that time and Waters saw it as a great opportunity to reach out to a wider audience. She soon had a cross-over pop hit with the song 'Dinah' and began acting in theatre shows.

1929 was a big turning point for Waters as she was featured, playing herself, in her first movie 'On With The Show'. Produced by Warner Bros, the hit film is noted as being the first all-colour (two-strip Technicolor) sound feature. Waters sang two songs in the film; Birmingham Bertha, and Am I Blue which became her second pop hit and is one of her signature songs. It's significant to see Waters as a Black Woman of this era among a predominantly white cast, thankfully being treated on-screen with the respect she deserves. She is dressed beautifully in silk with glamorous jewellery and a plume of ostrich feathers in her hair. Her vocal performances are met with huge applause from her white audience.

Ethel Waters career was evolving. In 1933, celebrated songwriters Harold Arlen and Ted Koehler wrote the classic sentimental ballad 'Stormy Weather' and gave it to Waters to record and perform. She debuted the song at The Cotton Club in Harlem with Duke Ellington and his Orchestra. Her performance and the record that followed were a huge success. Having recently had her second marriage break down, she devoted her time and emotion into her music.

In her 1951 biography, Waters said of Stormy Weather: 'I was singing the story of my misery and confusion, of the misunderstandings in my life I couldn't straighten out, the story of the wrongs and outrages done to me by people I had loved and trusted.... I sang "Stormy Weather" from the depths of the private hell in which I was being crushed and suffocated.'

Waters version of Stormy Weather was the original and it was hugely influential. It would be covered by the likes of Etta James,



Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday, Judy Garland, Ella Fitzgerald and Dinah Washington to name just a few. In 2003, Ethel Waters' recording of the song was inducted in the Grammy Hall of Fame.

When Irving Berlin, one of America's greatest songwriters heard Waters perform Stormy Weather at The Cotton Club, he offered her a place in his new Broadway revue As Thousands Cheer. It was to be the first time that a black woman would star in a Broadway musical. Berlin had composed a ballad for Waters to sing in the musical entitled Supper Time. The song is about a wife's reaction to news of her husband's lynching. Whilst many know that Billie Holiday's Strange Fruit is song written by a Jewish man Abel Meeropol addressing lynching in the South, less know that six years earlier Berlin, a Jewish man, and Waters, had already made their own powerful stand for civil rights with an anti-lynching song. Waters voice would bring many in her audience to tears as she sang with piercing emotion:

'Supper time
I should set the table
'Cause it's supper time
Somehow I'm not able
'Cause that man of mine
Ain't coming home no more'

Ethel Waters had a wonderful talent of connecting with her audience and pulling on their heart strings.

'I have no acting technique. I act instinctively. That's why I can't play any role that isn't based on something in my life.' She became the highest paid star on Broadway at that time.

In June 1939, Waters became the first African-American, male or female, to star in her own TV show, The Ethel Waters Show, a special broadcast on NBC. Her huge popularity led to her appearing in Hollywood movies including Cabin in the Sky, an MGM musical which also featured Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong. She would continue to feature in more than 25 films and TV shows throughout her career.

Whilst Waters professional life grew from strength to strength, her personal life suffered. In 1945, her third and final marriage ended. She would recall, 'I cannot help feeling I would have been happier with a husband and children of my own.'

Waters never did have the children she had hoped for, but her strong character and faith in God helped her through. In her biography she would write with pride 'I am somebody cause God don't make no junk!' Waters focussed all her energy on her career and in 1949 she was rewarded with a nomination for Best Supporting Actress for her role in the film Pinky, making her the second Black woman in history to be nominated for an Academy Award!

In 1950, Waters became the first African-American to star in the leading role of a television series, Beulah, which aired on ABC. In doing so she opened doors for other aspiring black actors and actresses and helped to better integrate national television. Waters starred as housekeeper Beulah for the first year of the series before quitting, complaining that the show's negative stereotypes and portrayal of black people was 'degrading.'

Having left the show, she decided to write her first autobiography His Eye Is on the Sparrow (1951), which tells in her own words of her fascinating life up to that point. Her cover of the gospel song of the same name is just beautiful and probably my most favourite of her recordings. Waters continued to perform Blues, Jazz and Pop music and in 1962 was featured as a guest star in the CBS' Crime Drama Route 66. Her guest appearance included a powerful vocal performance of Goodnight Sweet Blues that led to her becoming the first African-American Woman to be nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award.

In her later years, Waters turned her attention to God and toured with the Preacher Billy Graham on his crusades stating 'I, Ethel Waters, a 380-pound decrepit old lady, rededicated my life to Jesus Christ."'

Waters died in 1977, aged 80, from cancer and kidney failure in California.
Ethel Waters talent as a blues, jazz and pop vocalist was exceptional. Having suffered such hardship in her childhood, against all odds she rose to the top of the entertainment industry. As an African-American Woman, Waters achieved so many 'firsts' in her career. She was a phenomenal trailblazer who helped to racially integrate Broadway, National TV and Film, opening doors for others to follow.

NEWS...NEWS...NEWS...

SUPERSONIC BLUES MACHINE AND THEIR VOODOO NATION

IMAGE: Enzo Mazzeo

Supersonic Blues Machine will be releasing their band-new studio album Voodoo Nation on 24 June via Provogue/Mascot Label Group. The album once again features another coming together of icons along with some of the most exciting names in blues; Charlie Starr (Blackberry Smoke), Eric Gales, Joe Louis Walker, Ana Popovic, Kirk Fletcher, King Solomon Hicks, Josh Smith & Sonny Landreth. You can watch the official video for "8 Ball Lucy" ft. Sonny Landreth here.

"The general discontent in the world at the moment is so widespread, we get told to embrace it because that's life," says Fabrizio Grossi. "No, that's not life," he asserts. "It's how we're forced to live nowadays. Voodoo Nation refers to the times we're living in, at least here in the States, but I guess the whole world can relate. We're getting to the point where we're living out life almost as Zombies. We're little machines."

But there is always hope, which is what Supersonic Blues Machine has always been about.

Voodoo Nation is the band's third studio album. On their evolution, Fabrizio says, "Kris comes from this British school of hard rock and blues. This is a different sound to Kenny and me with the Allman Brothers, Sly Stone & The Family & Mountain. On Californisoul (2017), we were going more West Coast Funkadelic 60s and overall jam vibe. Blues but with more of a hippy flower power." "With Kris, we wanted his footprint there, so that's why you hear Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd, and Gary Moore. Kind of a Union Jack imprint over a Star-Spangled Banner."

BOOGIE WOOGIE FOR UKRAINE

by **Dom Pipkin** Images: **Steve Bra**

As the world tries to make sense of and respond in some useful humanitarian way to the invasion of Ukraine, one British woman had already been thinking on her feet. That woman is Claire Braund, who I first met at the UK Boogie-Woogie Festival in 2018.

She was there with her family as a punter and an amateur piano player. It's a great festival, with jamming and sitting in encouraged. Claire is a strong, non-pushy woman, a great piano player and a positive spirit. I'll let her take up the story in her own words.

CLAIRE BRAUND

I was very upset by what was happening in Ukraine, and had the idea of producing a compilation album to raise money for Unicef. I am an amateur boogie pianist and because I have run the not-for-profit website www.learnboogiewoogie.com for several years, and through friendships gained through the UK Boogie Woogie Festival in Dorset (UK), many of the world's boogie pianists know me or know of me.

That was 1st March. By lunchtime that day, graphic designer friends had produced logos, a Facebook page was set up and I sent out messages to boogie piano friends and acquaintances to ask for song donations. These came rolling in within hours.

Within a few days a UK recording engineer had donated time to mix and master the albums and Giger Media donated and others offered design and merch to assist with promotion - which you should all buy.

All that was left to me now was the small matter of co-ordinating the project, the production, distribution and the PR - and around my day job in IT. I should add I had never done anything like this before so had to educate myself fast on the world of music law and management.

A month on and I have received an amazing response from a who's who of nearly 50 pianists internationally who are donating either an existing track, a previously unreleased track or a specially recorded track for the albums which will be available for just two years from the release date.

Artists on board from the UK include: Jools Holland, Tom Seals, Bob Hall, Dom Pipkin, Diz Watson, Julian Phillips, Claire Hamlin, Matt Little, Liam Grundy, Big John Carter, The Chris Corcoran Band and Dale Storr.

From the US the list includes Grammy winner Jon Cleary, Wendy Dewitt, Sue Palmer, Ethan Leinwand, Carl Sonny Leyland, Ben Levin, Cary C Banks, Michael Drexler and Ricky Nye.

From Europe our list includes: Lluis Coloma, Axel Zwingenberger, Henri Herbert, Christian Cristl, Michael Hortig, Patrick Smet, Nico Brina, Katharina Alber, Ulrike Gaate, Chris Conz, Tor Einar Bekken, Eeco Rijken Rapp, Balazs Daniel, Chris Copen and more.

This project provides the artists involved with a way to support Unicef's Ukranian relief effort without financial outlay themselves, as many have suffered financially due to the pandemic.

The big headline for the music industry and fans of this style of music is that, unbelievably, there does not exist a compilation album that showcases contemporary international boogie-woogie, barrelhouse and New Orleans pianists. We are therefore collectively bringing something unique and exciting to fans and collectors for a vital cause whilst performing a valuable piece of cultural custodianship.

DOM PIPKIN

This last point alone is reason enough for anyone reading this to order a copy of this most excellent album. What a great opportunity to hear everyone in one place. There is such talent and vibrancy in this scene, with players you know and players you should know represented here. On a personal note, I can tell you that I've twice played music in Kyiv, the most recent visit being just back in September 2021. I met the people, played a warmly-received gig, went shopping in a mall, and we all went out to a local joint for late beers. As all humans know, the world is simply made up of other humans, nearly all of whom want nothing but peace and cooperation.

I asked the king of modern boogie-woogie, Germany's Axel Zwingenberger for his thoughts. It seems so unreal and absurd, that we have to witness a war in Europe, caused by an aggressor targeting people who fight for their freedom in a country they love. In the 21st century, this would be impossible, we thought. The war of Russia against the Ukraine teaches us, we were wrong. The reports of war atrocities make our blood freeze. You want to do something to help.

Music is a healer, said John Lee Hooker. It can bring some soothing to a depressed mind. It celebrates life, in all its varieties. It conveys happiness, and it can offer a way to cope with sadness. Boogie-woogie and the Blues were born out of trouble and suppression, but resulted in the most powerful and soulful musical expression imaginable. It makes everybody swing.

> **"Boogie-Woogie is a very apt form to express solidarity**

Dictators don't like that. In Germany under Hitler, it could be life-threatening to be a follower of Jazz, Blues and Boogie-Woogie. You could go to a concentration camp for listening to it. After World War II and the defeat of the Nazis by the Allies, it became the sound of freedom.

So Boogie-Woogie is a very apt form to express solidarity to people longing for freedom. I hope its drive and sheer joy will help o bring some hope and light to the Ukrainian people in these dark times. I'm glad and feel honoured to participate in this project. Boogie-Woogie for Ukraine - forever!

Claire, myself, Axel, and all the wonderful artists on this record urge you all to pick up a copy, and one or two for your friends, and to spread the word of its release as far as social media will take you. As Claire says - I hope the albums make a practical difference with the funds they raise for Unicef and sends a message to Ukranian people that the international blues piano world is rooting for them.

Follow our Facebook page and look out for a release date announcement in the music-Press.

FIND OUT MORE:

https://learnboogiewoogie.com/boogiewoogieforukraine/

INTERNATIONAL BLUES CHALLENGE 2022 BAND WINNERS

The International Blues Challenge represents the worldwide search for blues bands and solo/duo blues performers ready for the international stage, yet just needing that extra big break.

The world's largest gathering of blues musicians took place on Beale Street, with over 20 clubs hosting the challengers and fans. In addition to featuring these final rounds of the prestigious blues music competition, the IBC event week offered seminars, showcases, master classes, film screenings, networking events, book signings, and receptions for blues societies, fans, and professionals.

The 2022 winners are:

1st Place Band
THE WACKY JUGS
(France Blues)

2nd Place Band
CROS
(Phoenix Blues Society)

3rd Place Band
SOUL NITE FEAT. DK HARRELL
(Mississippi Delta Blues Society of Indianola)

1st Place Solo/Duo
ERIC RAMSEY
(Phoenix Blues Society)

2nd Place Solo/Duo
JHETT BLACK
(San Angelo Blues Society)

Memphis Cigar Box Award
ERIC RAMSEY
(Phoenix Blues Society)

Lee Oskar Harmonica Award
JHETT BLACK
(San Angelo Blues Society)

Gibson Guitarist Award
TC CARTER

Best Self-Produced CD Award
BORROWED TIME
by Memphis Lightning
(Suncoast Blues Society)

IBC AND BMA GA

1st Place IBC Band - THE WACKY JUGS from France

Annika Chambers estatic after winning BMA for Soul Blues Female Artist

ALLERIES

by Laura Carbone

1st Place SoloDuo & CigarBox Guitar Award - ERIC RAMSEY

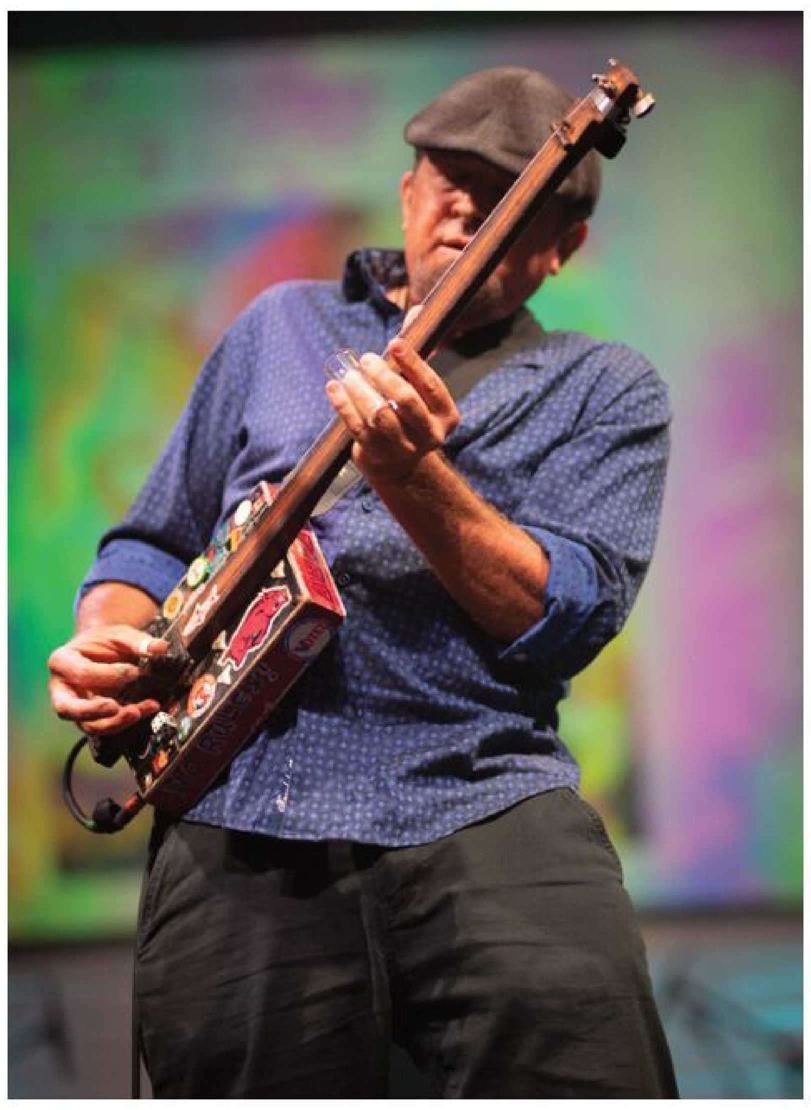
Zac Harmon wins the BMA for Soul Blues Album of the Year, Long As I Got My Guitar with Wayne Baker Brooks

John Nemeth wins BMA for Vocalist of the Year

Albert Castiglia and Mike Zito at the BMA's

Sue Foley wins two BMA's - Traditional Blues Female Artist and Traditonal Blues Album

Terrie Odabi with Anthony Paule



JP Soars performs at the BMA's

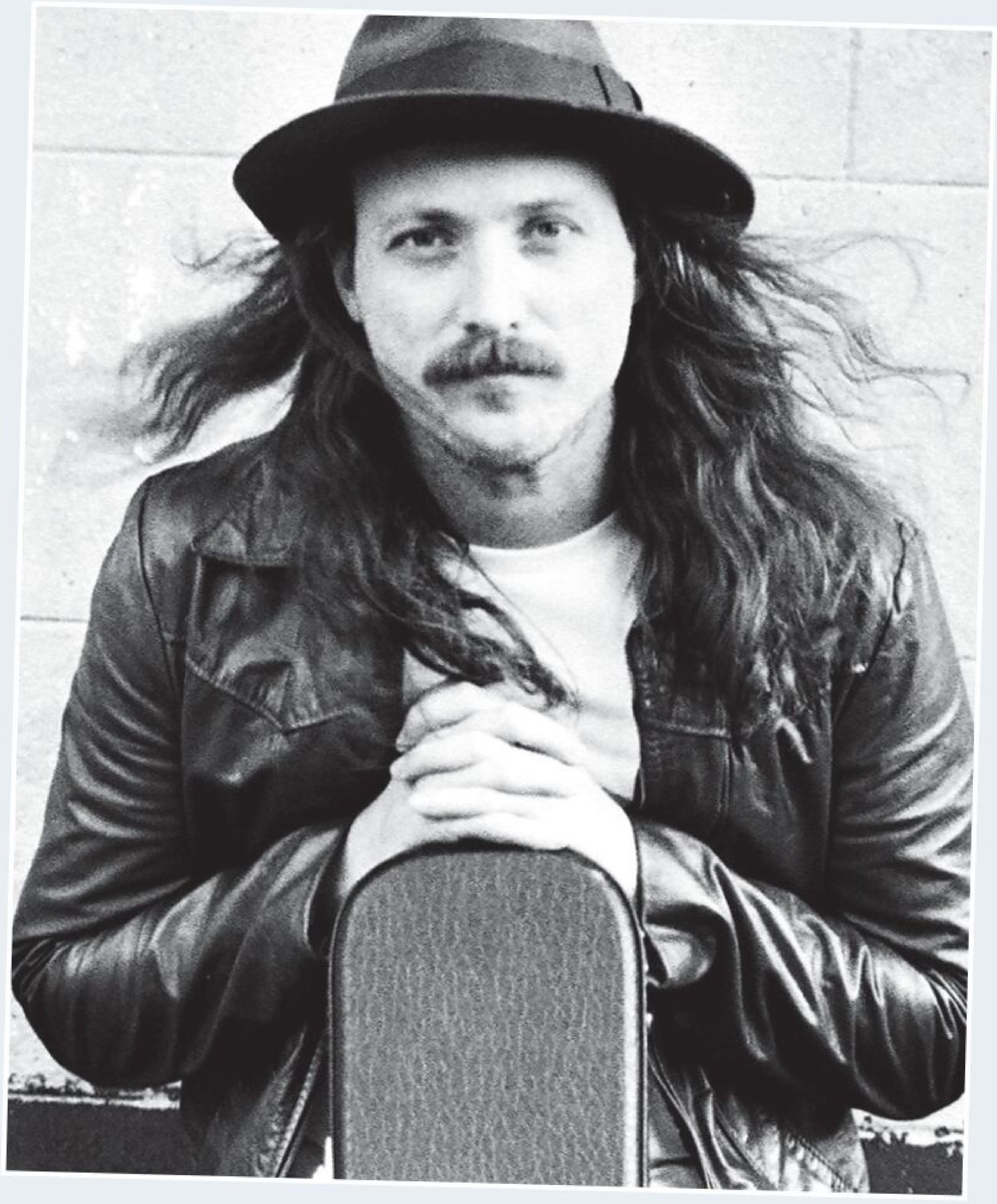
JANKY

GETJANKY.COM

Scott 'Janky' Lindsey is an Austin, Texas, singer/songwriter bluesman on a mission to bring 'good-time vibes' back to the blues. Janky reflects his love of the old Juke Joints in all his foot-stomping music. He is right at home busking on a street corner, playing a 'no-stage' bar, or making a big venue feel like a favourite Juke Joint. Janky plays an underground style of blues, music that originated in the seedy Juke Joints of North Mississippi. And he's on a mission to bring that Juke Joint style back to the blues world. Janky's biggest influences are Reverand KM Williams, RL Burnside and Junior Kimbrough, all leading exponents of the hugely popular Juke Joint North Mississippi sound. Janky was mentored in Juke Blues by Taxas blues great Reverand KM Williams. Besides playing bass for the Reverand, Janky also produced and recorded five of the Rev's CDs. He has also toured extensively with the Rev, soaking up and absorbing all that sound. Janky and his record label, ReverbUnit, have also produced six of Robert Kimbrough's albums and engineered, alongside playing lead guitar on, Robert's fourth CD, 'I Been Fixed', winner of the AMG (Artists/musicians Guild) Album of the Year. Robert Kimbrough is the son of the truly great Juke Joint blues legend, Junior Kimbrough. Janky has toured widely, playing throughout the USA and Europe, with Robert Kimbrough over the recent years, including gigs at many of Mississippi's biggest blues festivals. Richard Johnson, a former Blues Foundation IBC winner knows him well and holds him in high regard: 'Janky shows his love for Hill Country blues in his dedication to bringing something new to the table on his records. He's got just as much potential as any musician playing in these genres. Very focussed production. Wishing him lots of success with spreading this hard work,' he says. Janky can often be found playing around many of Austin City's indoor and outdoor venues, a city now holding a major, significant musical role globally and home to the leading SxSW annual festival event. Janky absorbs all of these extraordinary ifluences and features them in his own compositions, albums and music, while making regular festival appearances in France, Switzerland and many major events throughout the USA's south.

WILLIAM POYER

FACEBOOK.COM/POYERWILLIAM



My name is William Poyer, and I am about to release a new collection of songs on March 8th. I've always enjoyed writing songs, but my song-writing journey began almost 9 years ago to the day. March 1st, 2013, disillusioned and heartbroken, I flew to Mexico on a one-way ticket with an acoustic guitar and enough money to last me a few weeks. I found work, I wrote songs, I made friends, I wrote songs, I changed jobs, I wrote songs, I met a girl, I wrote songs, we moved cities, I wrote songs, and so on.

Every 6 months or so I thought I had enough material to return home to record an album, but inevitably I would scrap the songs, find new inspiration, and start again. 3 years, a wife, and a lot of songs later I eventually returned to the UK.

I released my first record, 'Born Lucky' in 2017 and quickly got to work trying to understand the London music scene. I played every gig I got offered, often to a crowd of my wife and the sound engineer, but over time met many amazing musicians, and musical communities.

It is impossible to talk about the London music scene, and my experiences within it, without mentioning Spiritual Records in Camden Town. A friend invited me to play there one night, and I remember it well, not just the talent of the artists, but the place as a whole. Like a time capsule, transporting you to days long forgotten, where only the music exists, and magic happens. It was at Spiritual bar that I met my friends Jade Bird, Kevin Davy White, Jack Francis, Jack Broadbent, and Ferris & Sylvester, among many other great talents.

Then came Covid... Whilst the world was in shut down, I got to work and wrote more songs. I knew I had my next record written, but I did not know how I was going to make it or who was going to produce it. My friends Ferris & Sylvester were due to be on tour but that got cancelled. We've been friends a long time; I'm a huge admirer their work and a collaboration has always been on the cards. They invited me down to their beautiful house and studio in the English countryside and we got to work making music.

I'm incredibly proud of this collection of songs and the journey we've been on to get here. And I'm excited to finally share it with you. "Forgiven' comes out on March 8th!

RARE UNION

A BAND BORN OUT OF THE PANDEMIC!

NEWEST
BLUES/ROCK GROUP
OF THE YEAR

ALL
ORIGINAL!

BROTHER OF MINE

BROTHER OF MINE is a deeply personal album, featuring a daring mix of percussion-driven, blues-influenced rock & roll with revealing, soul-baring, heartfelt vocals.

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THE HERBAL REMEDY

ELECTRIC BLUES BAND

One day a while ago Gary Grainger - award winning Blues DJ (The Blues Show on Bishop-FM) and acoustic blues musician - answered a question almost before it had been asked. Gary's friends and consummate acoustic blues duo Auld Man's Baccie had decided to take their particular and peculiar brand of blues into the electric realm. The question asked of Gary by slide guitar player Nick Phillips? "You play bass, don't you?" Gary knew that when he answered "Yes" as fast as he could, he was answering the next question too. And so it was that he joined the band, known as The Herbal Remedy and described as an electric roots and juke joint band. Auld Man's Baccie already had a repertoire of original songs written by Davey Curtis and had three successful CD releases too. It was these songs that formed the basis of the repertoire for The Herbal Remedy, with new songs joining the setlist. When John Timney shuffled into the drum seat, things really started to gel for the band, with gigs in pubs around the North East of England. Audiences warmed to the humour of the songs, especially when performed with the expertise of these band members, and return bookings were commonplace. When the time was right it as decided that a CD should be recorded. Engineered, produced, and drummed by John Timney, Land Of the Livin' was recorded in the round, almost live, with minimal overdubs, and featured 10 original songs, ranging from the country blues of Shotgun Blues, through the humour of Lifetime Guarantee to the darkness of Church of Lost Souls. The CD garnered excellent reviews and lots of airplay too. Pete Feenstra said "The album bristles with energy and bursts with lyrical imagery. Best of all, the band sounds at home in the studio laying down what they probably do night after night in front of a live audience. But it's the additional polished production values of this independent release that makes the difference." Full review here: The Herbal Remedy Land Of The Livin' Just when the band were ready to stretch their wings, the country shutdown for 2 years, of course. Since gigs have returned the band have been able to continue playing in pubs around the North East, with support slots at local blues clubs for The John Verity Band, The Sean Webster Band, and, er, Eddie & The Hot Rods & Department S! The band are now ready to broaden their horizons, with, on top of local gigs, festival & support slots around the country pencilled in the diary, and work has begun on writing the songs for the next album.

BISON HIP

WWW.BISONHIP.COM

"We've been through so many things in our lives, ups and downs, some successes and a whole load of failures"

Bison Hip are a Glasgow based Blues Rock band, formed during a lockdown Zoom call in early 2020. "I don't know who actually suggested it first", explains vocalist Paul, "but right away it seemed like a great idea. Maybe it was the mid-life crisis at play!". The band are all over 50, except for keyboard player Stevie, who clocks in at a youthful 40. "We wanted to take our love of blues and rock and mix it up with our life experiences" adds Paul. "We've been through so many things in our lives, ups and downs, some successes and a whole load of failures, we needed that to be reflected in the music, in the lyrics. Lastly, we needed to add some of the character our of hometown, Glasgow – I hope we've achieved that". The band have drawn from a wide range of influences. "Hard Again by Muddy Waters was one of the albums that got us through lock down, that reinvigorated our love of not only blues, but music in general". The Bison Hip ethos is clear: real musicians, real instruments, no click tracks, culminating in a unique sound with real life stories. "We'd love to inspire musicians of a similar age group to dust off those guitars and get out there to tell the stories of their own lives". The debut EP, Dear Greens & Blues, is available now at www.bisonhip.com

BLUE MILK

INSTA: @BLUEMILK_BAND

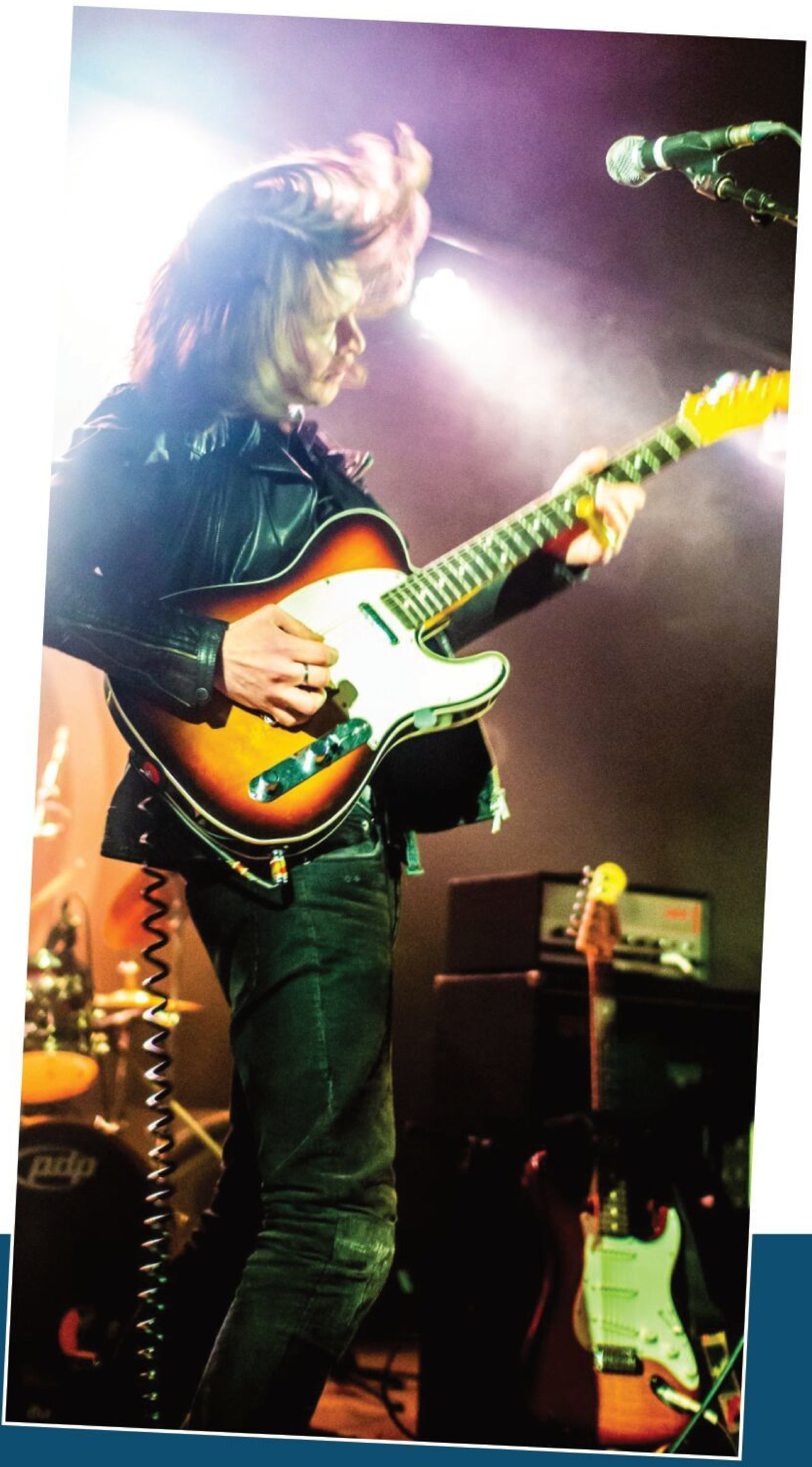
Glasgow-based Blue Milk are truly modern Bluesmen, channelling the raw spirit of Blues in its most authentic form, whilst simultaneously bringing an electric driven twist to the genre.

Off the back of their first single - 'Moonshine' in 2018, the band played a sold out show supporting Grammy Winner Fantastic Negrito at one of Glasgow's premier venues King Tuts. Following this, they played the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in 2019 and were featured on a double bill with English soul singer Kyla Brox at the Edinburgh Blues Club.

The band have grown together as Blues musicians over their five years together, which is evident in their live performances, and their 2020 EP "Coal In The Fire," has brought them radio attention on the Cerys Matthews BBC Radio show, resulting in them being booked to support Grammy Winner - Christone "Kingfish" Ingram when he comes to Scotland in June 2022.

Taking their name from the classic Captain Beefheart album Safe As Milk, Blue Milk are heavily influenced by Delta and Hill country legends, but also take inspiration from modern Blues acts, resulting in a raw brand of dirty electric Blues which is entirely their own.

BLUEBLOODSBLUEBLOODSBLUEBLOODSBLUEBLOODS



The dynamic 4-piece boasts driven, electric slide guitar and rousing melodies from Jonny McGiffen (guitar, vocals) the wailing howl of Leo S. Glaister's harmonica, powerfully resonant undertones from Ike Malinki (bass guitar, backing vocals) and infectious grooves from Taylor Whyte (drums, backing vocals). The band form a tight unit onstage and are currently playing electric Delta Blues style originals in venues across Britain, delivering deeply compelling concerts, charged with intense sincerity and relentless energy.

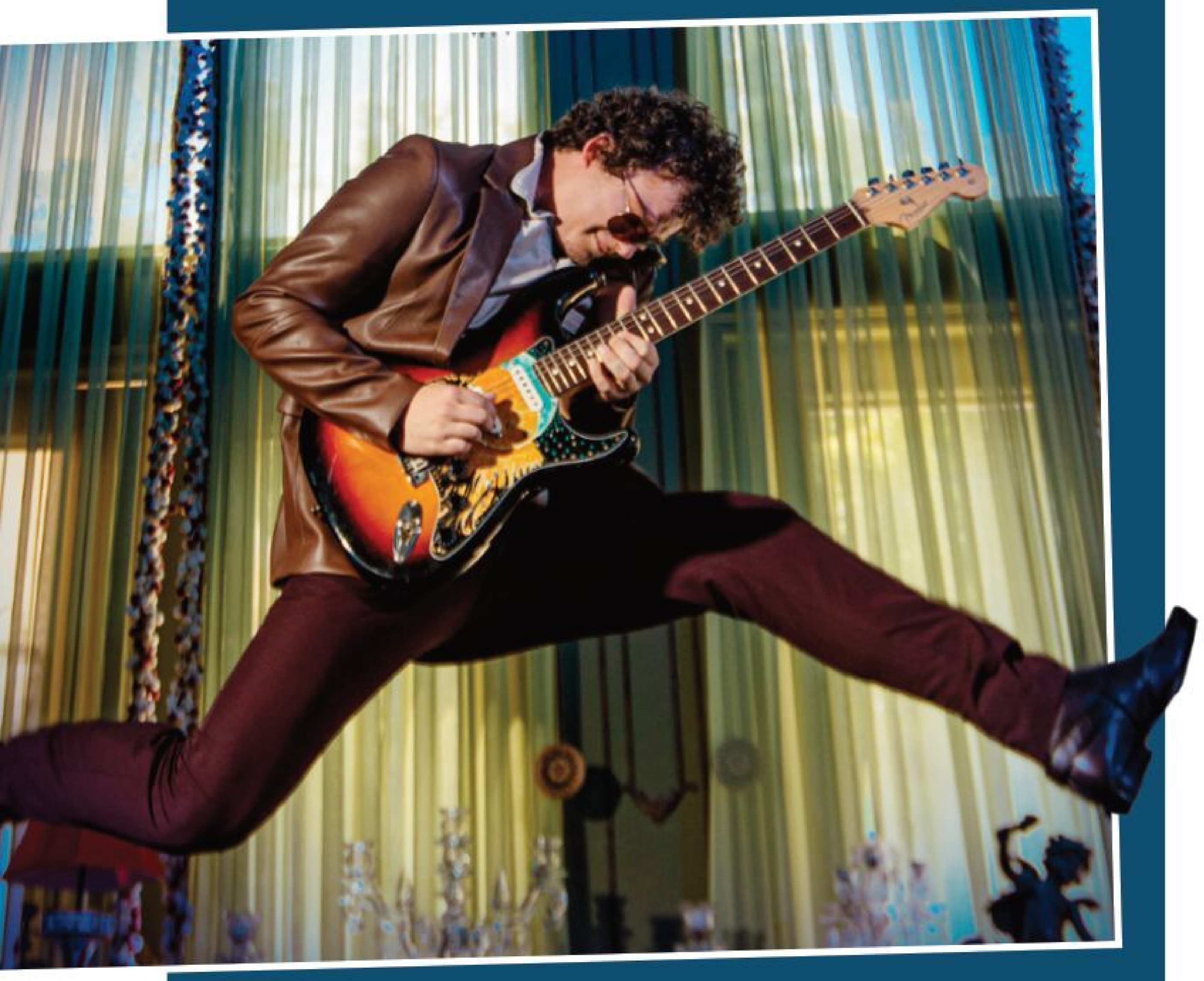
Following the buzz of their sold out EP launch of "Coal In The Fire" at The Hug & Pint in Glasgow, they have since released new singles - "Street Rolling Man" & "Come Back Around', which received radio play across Europe and America.

Currently the band are spending time in the studio getting ready for 2022 festivals including York Blues Festival and Eden festival. They are working on their live set and recording their new singles for release later this year.

Blue Milk are at the cutting edge of modern Blues, fusing the Delta to the Electric. They are a one-of-a-kind roots group not to be missed.

CLAY MELTON

CLAYMELTON.COM



Blues-rock prodigies are a special breed. They live and breathe the fiery swagger of electric guitars and the irresistible allure of rhythm-soaked sounds. That's Clay Melton's musical calling in a nutshell. At only 27, the Louisiana-born and Texas-based blues-rocker has already spent 14 years performing live. His powerfully raspy voice and wicked guitar licks leave no doubt he's grown up in the school of barroom blues-rock. The Houston, Texas-based artist is releasing his newest record, a new album dubbed, "Live in Texas" - a lineup of brand new material recorded live in Houston, Texas at the famed Dosey Doe. Captured by 5-time Grammy Award-winning Engineer, Malcolm Harper of ReelSound Recording Co. (Buda, TX) and mixed by longtime collaborator Sebastian Cure (Barranquilla, Columbia), and Mastered by Kevin Butler of Test Tube Audio (Austin, TX). The lead single off the album "Imaginary Traveler" hit the streets in April as the lead up to the full album's release worldwide Friday, June 3rd.

Clay's 2021 release, Back to Blue (July 2021), is spinning on more than 160 radio stations in the U.S. and abroad. As of August 21st, Roots Music (the #1 independent music chart in the world) ranked Clay on the Blues Rock charts with the #1 song in the world for the title track Back to Blue, #9 album in the world, and #7 album in Texas for all genres. Back to Blue is Melton's follow-up to 2017's critically acclaimed, full-length debut Burn the Ships which climbed the charts to #5 on Billboard Heatseekers. Back to Blue boasts production and engineering credits by Grammy-winner Danny Jones (Stevie Ray Vaughan, Patti LaBelle, Etta James) as well as Clay himself. Clay Melton is quickly establishing himself as a rising star, most recently opening for Grand Funk Railroad on the Chevrolet Main Stage at the State Fair of Texas. Past credits also include opening for blues-legend Robert Cray and platinum-selling artist Chris Daughtry.

LILLY MARTIN

WWW.LILLYMARTIN.COM

For me, the antidote for the blues is blues music. And soul music is nourishment for my life force. Fusing these music genres together is what I do naturally.

I am a native New Yorker who has made Switzerland home. No matter how much I love my adopted home, I am still, at my core composed of sunlight between skyscrapers, yellow taxis, endless pavements, red-brick and fire escapes. I am the result of the city's melting pot of cultures and music.

My instrument is my voice. When I sing, I am in my element. I sing every song as a story, each one beckoning me to convey not only what is there but also what is, possibly, between the lines. When this expression of storytelling begins, I am in a flow that feels otherworldly, trancelike, or remote controlled. I let go and immerse myself in it. I can play a few, very rough and basic, chords on the guitar which helps me begin the process of songwriting. However, it's when I sit together with my partner and producer Michael Dolmetsch that the songs take professional shape and come to life. As a multi-instrumentalist and arranger he can skillfully help craft our music ideas and bring them to the next level. Our synergy is remarkable.

This month marks the release of my 5th solo album "Lookout". With the experience that comes with a few lifeyears under my belt, I have developed a mindset that favorably regards this point in my life as having a vantage point. It is the lookout from which I observe and keep watch for what is to come. I rarely look back. The 12 track album brings blues, soul and even a jazz-tinged piece into view. It is a collection of emotion and styles within my favored music genres. Michael and I worked with a variety of musicians for this production. Our aim was to highlight and match each instrumentalist's expression to the selected track. It has been great to work in this way and, ultimately, it is a huge reward to feel so happy with the outcome.

While studio time is always a great way to proclaim and memorialize your abilities, it is the exhilaration of performing live that brings me the most. To be able to meet your audience personally and hear firsthand that you have moved someone deeply is enormously satisfying. These acknowledgements, these personal interactions give my crazy musician life purpose and value.

CHRISTOS
& THE VIOLET CROWN FEAT. OLINA
CHRISTOSANDTHEVIOLETCROWN.COM

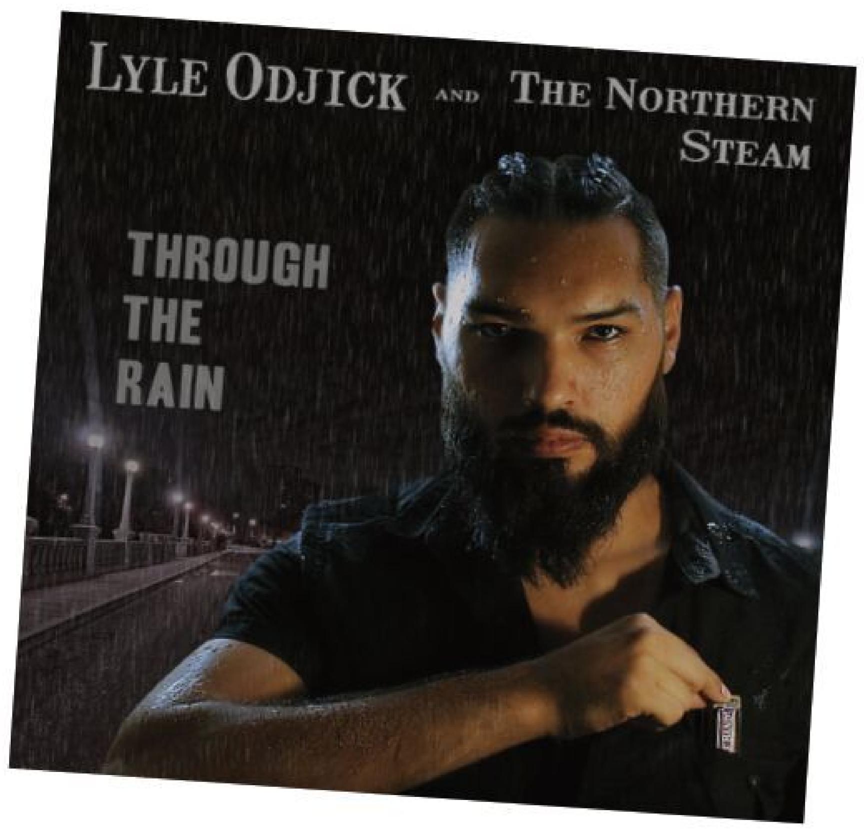
The Ancient Greek poet Pindar wrote of Athens...

"City of light, with thy violet crown, beloved of the poets, thou art the bulwark of Greece."

Christos Chatzispyrou is a London-based electric guitarist and songwriter originally from Athens – hence the name of his fascinating new project. Olina Bakali, the vocalist in the combo, is also from Greece – the island of Limnos – but they met, entirely coincidentally, in London."We worked on the EP remotely during lockdown. I sent her the songs and she worked on her contribution on her own. We both like to be very introspective about what we do, so that was absolutely fine!" Asked about whether he thought their music was in way especially Greek Christos says – "There is a darker sound in the Greek tradition, a melancholy feel. There have been blues and rebetika crossovers. The Mediterranean blues definitely exists!" Indeed, there have been collaborations between rebetika players and blues musicians, including Louisiana Red and Stelios Vamvakaris. Christos goes on to explain his own history with the blues:-"I first heard John Lee Hooker and just loved the rawness and hypnotic nature of his music. Then came BB King and the vocal quality of his guitar lines, and indirectly Albert King is an influence too, with the way he bends and smears notes. Then there are the jazzers, Grant Green in particular. I did a PhD in guitar! The title of my thesis is – 'Developing new expressive techniques for the electric guitar with the use of the Ebow, inspired by the sound of the free jazz saxophone.'"

Olina is an academic too – a marine biologist and forensic scientist – but that doesn't mean the resultant music is in any way obscure. The songs on the self-titled debut EP are eminently accessible, living in the spaces between a variety of musical forms – a 21st Century Blues sound that draws influences from R&B, Jazz and Rock. They are guided by Christos's mercurial, virtuosic guitar lines; while Olina's warm, bluesy melismas and lush vocal arrangements complete the atmosphere. The emphasis is more on the Fantastic Negrito/Adia Victoria end of the blues, for sure, but it represents a fresh and exciting take on the genre. Christos has performed and recorded extensively with bands such as Dr Schwamp, Ta Mére, Blue Soup and Told Americans at festivals and venues for over a decade. After a triumphant live debut with The Violet Crown combo – supporting the Grammy-nominated Southern Avenue at London's Jazz Café – you will be seeing a lot more of this fascinating band, as they work towards releasing their debut album later in the year. The future's bright, the future's violet.

LYLE ODJICK
& THE NORTHERN STEAM
LYLEODJICK.CA



Originating from the Algonquin reservation of Kitigan Zibi, QC, now based in Ottawa, Ontario, Lyle Odjick went from living in a small town with very little exposure to blues or live music to teaching himself harmonica and starting his own blues band.

After playing one gig with a borrowed house band he knew he needed to scout out some local blues musicians on the Ottawa scene to form his own blues band. Less than a month later 'The Northern Steam' was formed and became a solid foundation for his Chicago blues harmonica driven sound. What began as a blues cover band with a fat swinging rhythm section and a harmonica wielding front man has evolved into a high energy blues-rock band with their own foot stomping sound. With a burning desire to play on stage, Odjick went from strumming in a small town to opening for heavy hitting acts such as Colin James, Randy Bachman, MonkeyJunk, Paul Reddick and more.

A few recent festival appearances include RBC Ottawa Bluesfest (x2), Calabogie Blues & Ribfest (x2), Mont Tremblant International Bluesfest, Junofest and Ottawa's Westfest. Whether they're showcasing their original blues-rock material or performing a modern take on a blues classic by Muddy Waters, Lyle Odjick & The Northern Steam never cease to turn heads at every venue they play.

Through The Rain, the long awaited debut album by Lyle Odjick & The Northern Steam, is set to be released June 10, 2022.

A 10-song blues rock album recorded primarily at Tone King Records and mixed/ mastered/ produced by Jason Fryer. All vocals were recorded by band keyboardist Sean McGee inside his personal studio. Through The Rain consists of eight original tracks written by Lyle Odjick as well as two covers of old blues favourites "Leaving Trunk" made popular by Taj Mahal as well as "Rock This House" by Jimmy Rogers.

Featured musicians on this project include The Northern Steam's Ben Griggs on rhythm and lead guitar duties, Fred Sebastian on drums and Sean McGee on keys / organ. Special guest session players include Mike Turenne on bass, Jason Fryer on lead guitar, Tanya Paulin on background vocals for "Rock This House" and award-winning Tony D (MonkeyJunk) on lead guitar duties. All lead vocals and harmonica are performed by Lyle Odjick as well as rhythm guitar duties on "Through The Rain", "Bad For You" and "Devil Man's Dues".

The album is years in the making and aptly named after the track "Through The Rain", as it represents what all parties involved in the recording process had to go through in order to complete the long delayed project.

UK BLUES AWARDS THE WINNERS!

After two years of holding these Awards on line it was great to be back hosting them live!

The UK Blues Federation organise these awards to give recognition to those who have made an impact over the year preceding. With 2021 having been a year where we found ourselves creeping out of lockdowns and many finding themselves slowly establishing and re-establishing themselves and having to adapt to survive, it felt great to show some recognition to those who had made a mark. But these were just the tip of the iceberg with so many others nominated across the UK.

"At the 2022 awards there were no losers"

We look forward to next years Awards as we see these other artists, bands, DJ's and events establishing themselves.

At the 2022 awards there were no losers - every single artist, band, DJ and event that has been spoken about, nominated or made it to the hallowed Finalist stage is a winner. Every single one of them deserves so much recognition and support and it's the people who were watching the show, the people that nominated and voted that give them that support and for that we thank you all.

The whole event is now available to watch again on There UK Blues Federation's Youtube channel at www.Youtube.com/UKBluesFederation.

- **Richard Dunning**, UKBlues Federation

IMAGES by PAUL MAY

Category	Winner
Vocalist of The Year	Grace Bond (When Rivers Meet)
Instrumentalist of The Year	Dom Martin
Band of The Year	When Rivers Meet
Acoustic Artist of The Year	Dom Martin
Young Artist of The Year	Connor Selby
Emerging Artist of The Year	Emma Wilson
Album of The Year	Saving Grace - When Rivers Meet
Club/Venue of The Year	Tuesday Blues - 100 Club, London
Festival of The Year	Carlisle Blues & Rock Festival
Broadcaster of The Year	Cerys Matthews
International Artist of The Year	Christone "Kingfish" Ingram
Unsung Hero Award	Alan Pearce
Unsung Hero Award	Bob Hokum

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CHRIS BADNEWS BARNES
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with The Horns of Hells Kitchen
B.B. KING'S
Bluesville
SiriusXM Radio
TOP 15 RACK OF BLUES
8 Weeks In A Row
"...The King of the Hokum Blues,
Long live the king!"
JD Nash, AMERICAN BLUES SCENE
FOR BOOKING CONTACT
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rick@intrepidartists.com

PATTI PARKS *ANOTHER THING*

Patti Parks is no newcomer to the blues stage, a seasoned performer, her voice cuts through the mass and delivers spine-tingling blues blasts with an apparent ease and controlled confidence. Blues Matters grabbed the chance to chat about her new album, life on the road and her hopes looking ahead.

by **Glenn Sargeant** Images: **Supplied**

With Patti Parks latest album 'Whole Nother World' just out now and produced by Kenny Neal, I'm initially curious about how that creative collaboration came about.

"Kenny and I had performed in a festival where I reside and we went over some of the material that I had been working on. He decided to offer me an opportunity to come down and record some songs with him in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Kenny not only produced the album, but also played and performed on the album."

The opening track -'I'm Trouble' - has a real percussive groove to it. Who played drums on this, I ask; before adding, it sounds like it was recorded live?

"Yes, it was recorded live and it was in the Kenny Neal studio in Baton Rouge. His brother played drums on that particular cut," she confirms.

And what about, 'More Than You'll Ever Know?' I know it was written by Kenny Neal, Robert F. Greenlee and Erica Guerin, but, again, what is the background behind that track? :

"That song is about trust and always having to make sure that that whoever may be insecure, that they understand they will always be there and don't be afraid they'll always be there by your side"

Then we have your take on the James Brown classic 'Man's World'. What was it in particular that drew you to that song?

Patti says, "That is one of my favorite James Brown tunes and it has to do with just the world being connected and that we are as equals in this world and that our voices need to be heard as the same."

Life as a working musician can take its toll and for a singer there's always a need to protect the vocal chords themselves. How do you look after your voice? I ask:

"I make sure they get plenty of rest and fluid kind of reduce the coffee cuz I love coffee and once in a while a glass of wine but before I'm performing I make sure that I cut basically all of that out and make sure I get, like I said, plenty of rest and some vocal exercises."

Here you duet with Kenny Neal on 'Baby Bee' with this rich harmonica tone. Had you performed that track together before you recorded it, like at a live gig for example?:

"No, that song was never done live. It was actually one of the songs that we decided on that day. I didn't even know the words until I actually reviewed it and I remember Kenny saying ' just sing the song;' but I was so pleased with that recording. It's one of my favorites and, most importantly, I love Kenny's voice not only the harmonica on that but the guitar."

'Don't Play Me Cheap' has a late-night New York jazz club kinda vibe and I wondered if Patti might be a fan of Billy Joel at all?

"Absolutely a fan of that Billy Joel; and I love the flavor of that tune and sometimes you just need to change change it up a little bit. When I perform that song in particular the audience is just engaged with, I think, the choices and the melody as well as the chord progression. Again, it's it's one of my favorite songs of the album as far as you know having it a little bit slower than the others," she explains.

In doing my research, I found that Patti Parks launched The Nurse and Blues Project in 2015. So, I ask her to reflect on that particular project and its personal importance to her:

"Thank you for bringing this up. I started this program because I wanted to help young adults and younger children who suffer from chemical dependency since I suffered that myself with my son I know what it's like to watch a child of yours deal with such an addiction. So, I use the blues genre as the way for people to express deep-rooted feelings; it's a very safe way to do that and we have actually seen over 1,500 people at this time. We continue with the program and we're looking forward to its future."

'I Can't Think' is quite groovy with the horns sound. I wonder if that imight be a set-opener for live shows and Patti agrees:

"Well, 'I Can't Think' is certainly a party song, more so for the second set, I think. But everybody enjoys it. They love it as a matter of fact ;they sing along with that song. It's awesome to see the audience enjoy it so much. iI's got that groove where you want to get up and you want to dance."

I have to ask about her thinking, her touring hopes to promote this latest release internationally and in UK and Europe: "I'm so glad you asked that question too. My sights are on Europe, my sights are to come to the UK. Some of my most favorite artists are from UK, so I'm looking forward. I'm hopeful that door will be open shortly."

The album closes with 'No Means No' a determined and emotive number, a track that could have been tricky to cut I suggest: " No, that song wasn't difficult to record. I do think that it's quite different in terms of layout of the song but actually the musicians that are on this recording are excellent. I got the feeling, the flavour of the song very easily. That's very simplistic in its message, but it's meant to be that way. It's meant to be powerful and reflective of current times."

What makes Patti Parks happy and what makes her unhappy, I ask: "What makes me most most happy is performing and and meeting new people, seeing that they enjoy my music. I'm unhappy when I'm sitting still. So, I'm looking forward to a very very busy future," she ends with a laugh.

> *my sights are to come to the UK*

INA FORSMAN

Berlin-based singer/songwriter Ina Forsman finally feels though she has found her musical home. The artist has coined the sound on her forthcoming album Cinematic Soul.

by **Adam Kennedy** Images: **Johanna Rontu**

During the pandemic era, the versatile performer pushed herself creatively and artistically through writing music and developing new skills. “The pandemic was fruitful for me in a way. When you have to stay at home, you tend to go to that corner where you do your music and your magic,” explains Ina. “I spent a lot of time, of course, writing songs, and not only writing songs but learning different ways to play and to do music - production and stuff like that. So, there was a silver lining there.”

Like many, Forsman encountered mixed emotions and internal battles during the lockdown period. “There were those dark times when you had to do a little bit of soul searching,” said Ina. “I guess, for me, the biggest thing was to realise how much of my self-worth I put on being a musician. That version of me who is always dressed up and looking good and singing on stage, and people are applauding me. I had built all my self-worth on that version of me. Then when I had no fancy dresses on, I didn’t have a crowd who would cheer me up; I realised I feel like absolute trash. I had to build that up - that I’m still the same person. I’m valued just as much, even if I didn’t do music and that’s a tough road and a conversation to have with yourself.”

Ina’s new album ‘All There Is’ was recorded during two sessions. One in Berlin produced by Guy Sternberg and the second in Helsinki under the auspices of producer Michael Bleu. The European chanteuse took a slightly different approach towards recording in each location. In Berlin the band were recorded live, whereas during the Helsinki session it was decided that each instrument would be captured individually. The latter was something that the performer found beneficial. “I’ve always recorded the basic band live. On these ones [in Helsinki] we recorded one instrument at a time,”

explains Forsman. “The mixing engineer [Michael Bleu], he’s multitalented. He’s an artist, he’s a producer, and he also directed my music video for Don’t Lose Today.” Collectively the pair clicked musically. “We both share the same passion for old school soul, and not only the music, but the sound and how it was mixed,” says Ina. “We just hit it off completely, and we both had a very similar vision where we wanted to take the songs.”

Each of these recording sessions reflects a slightly different side of the artist’s repertoire. “There are these two sides of me showing up. In the first session, we did a lot of ballads, a lot of the softer stuff; still soulful but maybe leaning towards the jazzier, softer side of me. Then during the Helsinki session, we recorded some up-tempo songs. One song is in a very rock, bluesy kind of space,” explains Ina. “I think I’ve really found a place where I’m comfortable musically. Especially after the Helsinki session and the way that the songs were mixed. For many of those songs, I had this feeling of - this is how it was supposed to always be. I wish I could redo all my albums with this guy right now.”

The artist’s recent musical endeavours have lit a creative spark for Ina Forsman. “Now this album is coming out I almost feel like I want to start making the next album already. Because now I have such a clear vision for that too,” she says. “The theme for this album was Cinematic Soul. I wanted to make big soulful music, and that usually comes with strings, big horn arrangements and big backing vocals. That’s the ongoing theme on the album.”

Ina’s latest single, Don’t Lose Today is an uplifting number and one of the many highlights of her new album. “I criticise myself a lot, and I don’t let myself get off easy on any project, but that’s still a song where I listened to it, and I’m like, yep - I did a good job with this. I can’t bring myself down even if I tried,” says Ina, and this writer would agree. “The song was born through a conversation; I was talking with my husband. I asked him if he was happy with the situation that he was in. He said, just out of the blue - I feel like I’m working to build a better tomorrow, but while I’m doing that, I’m losing today. I’m there looking at him, like, where did that come from? How do you say something like that? Because he’s a man of few words. He doesn’t say anything extra. He goes straight to the point, and then he says something so beautiful and sad.”

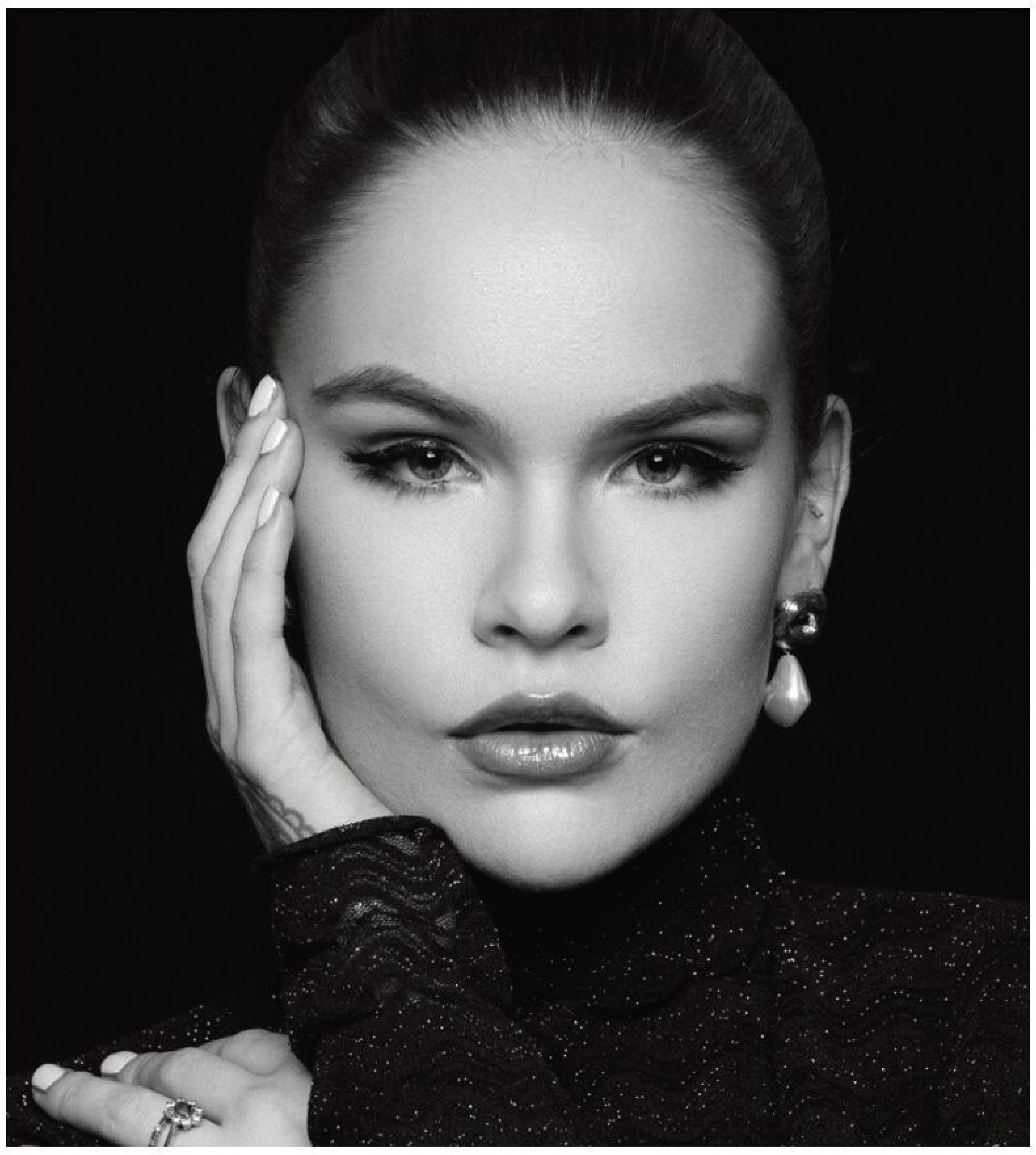
Subsequently, the seed of thought was planted. “I tried to comfort him, and I tried to talk. Then we kept on talking about it. Ten minutes later, he tells me, by the way, you should write a song about that. And I’m like, oh honey, I’m already halfway through it in my head,” said Ina. “The song is from the point of view of three people in my life. It’s from my point of view, my husband’s point of view, and then my dad’s point of view a little bit. These are the three people I know in my life who are workaholics. We all want to build a better life for ourselves and our families. But a lot of times, we just forget to enjoy the fruits of our labour because we’re already on to the next project. The song is a note to self. I don’t live in today every day. So, it’s a reminder for myself to do so.”

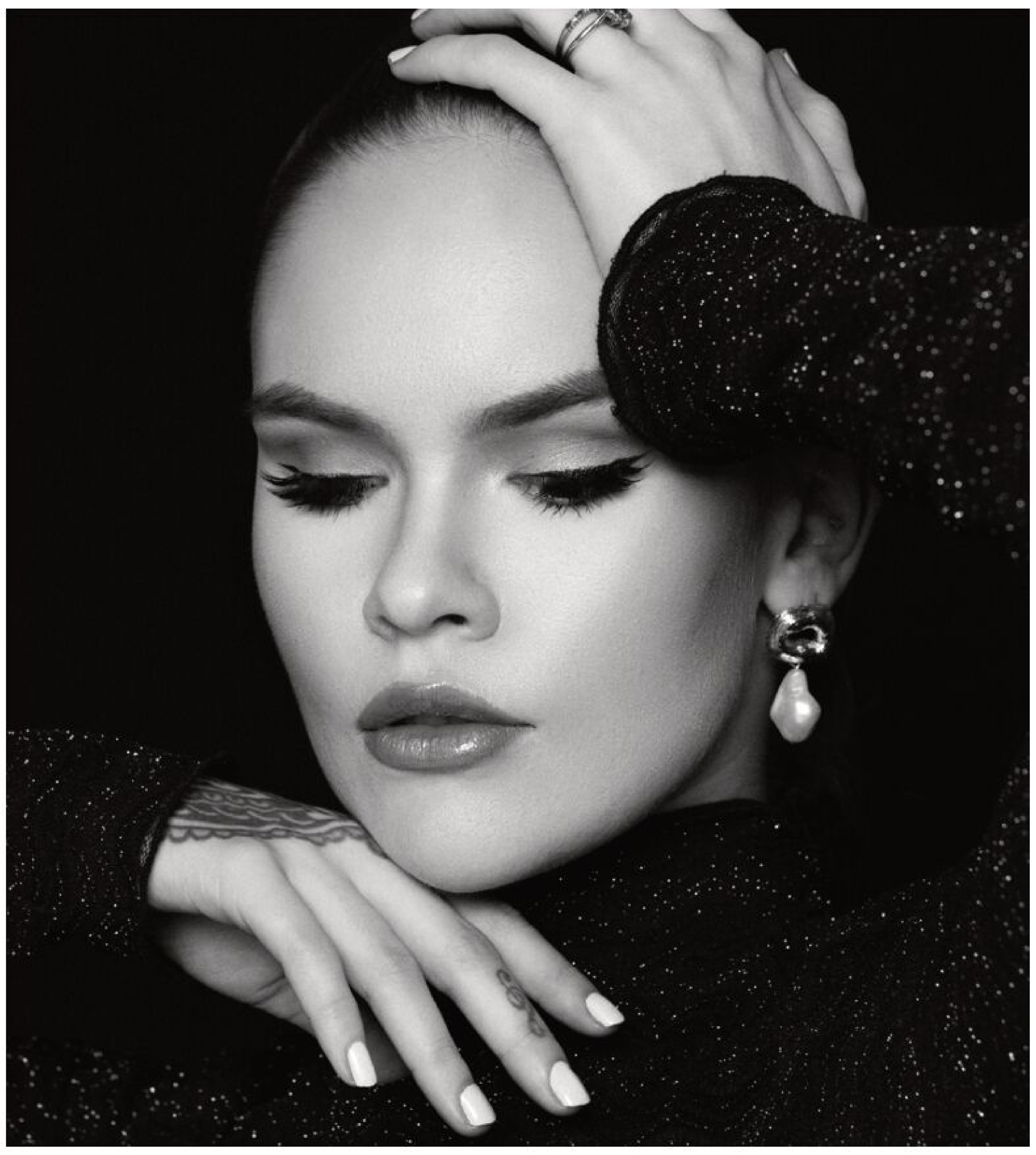
Moving forward, the soulful songstress has a hectic touring schedule on the horizon. “Right now, we have some nice festivals coming up. We are planning a tour or a few tours at the end of the year,” says Ina. “One big thing for me is that I’m doing this big show in Finland in Helsinki. I’m playing at the Tavastia Club, which is this legendary rock club in Helsinki. It’s the kind of club that if you play there, you’re a big deal. You could brush your shoulders off a little bit as a musician if you play there as a headliner.”

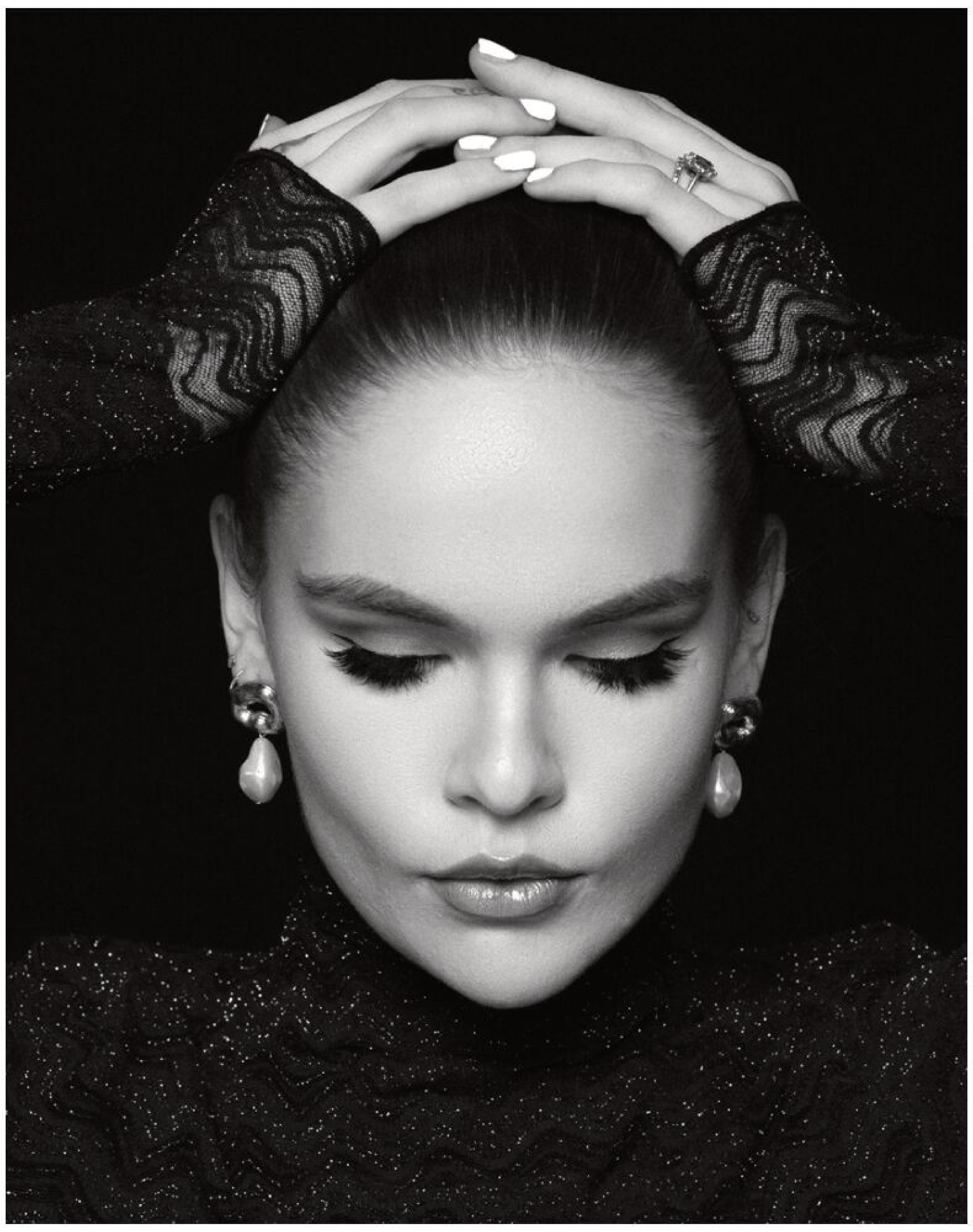
The artist is looking to bring her new musical vision to life on the stage. “I’ve been doing a whole week of rehearsals; we are building a new set – rearranging a lot of my songs. I’m going song by song, verse by verse, really creating a spectacle. I want to create a really good live show, because I have seven people in my band. So, I figure I want to make the kind of show where each and every musician is going to work their ass off on the stage because we can create a really big sound,” said Ina. “I want to bring that Cinematic Soul experience to live shows as well. I’m even rearranging some of my older songs to sound more like they would sound if they were on this new album. I’ve been enjoying that. So, I guess I want to say that wherever we’re going to play or do a show, the show is going to be killer - I can guarantee that.”

All There Is, the new album from Ina Forsman will be released on June 24th by Jazzhaus Records.

inaforsman.com







STEVE ELLIS

A DIFFERENT KIND OF AFFAIR

by **Iain Patience** Images: **Supplied**

When a leading international musician opens up and says: 'Maybe if we live long enough, we grow into what we always wanted to be. Just maybe, if we stick at what we love, it'll come around and come good. Steve Ellis has earnt the right to sing the Blues if he wants. And sing it he does!' a guy's curiosity tends to get piqued. When the person trumpeting the view is none other than Paul Weller, you just know this is somebody you really must speak to…soon.

Steve Ellis describes himself as a 'Finchley Boy,' a thought captured as the title of a career-spanning, ten-disc record set just launched on Sony Records. Speaking to Steve at home in Brighton, it also becomes immediately apparent that he has, as he is first to admit, pretty much 'lived the dream.' As our conversation rambles along, ducking-and-diving down various sideways and alleys, one thing remains constant, a frequent explosion of laughter. Maybe part of Ellis's core, it seems.

After half a century as a professional musician, Ellis is happy to relax and look back over a career that still rolls along nicely, with touring demands around every corner, and a voice that is truly wonderful. This is a man who can sing with the best of them, no melodic warbling here; instead we have full-throttle vocal delivery that is raucous and commanding but always underpinned by a life-long passion for the best of southern soul music. Oh yes, this guy can sure sing.

Fifty-odd years ago, Ellis was a familiar face, a bouncing Mod with a huge international hit. As frontman with band, Love Affair, his song 'Everlasting Love' became one of those perennial wonder-hits, a sort of 'sound of the sixties,' and one of those tracks that everyone has probably heard, and loved and enjoyed. Even now, I've yet to meet anyone who doesn't love the track. And when I tell Ellis this, he laughs before thanking me and adding:

> *we had to get better or we'd have got killed!*

"Thanks, it's strange, looking back. But people still come up to me because of it. Been a burden and a blessing. When

www.steveellis.co.uk

I look back there was a time when I used to refuse to do it live, back in the early days. I was doing my thing with Zoot (Money). He's mad as a box of frogs but he's one of my best pals! We end up on the phone for hours, just laughing all the time. He's been on tour with the Animals just recently."

The song itself hit number one in the UK charts, and also had a top-ten listing in at least seven other countries, before going on to sell over ten million copies. Covers came aplenty, including recordings by a diverse crew from U2 to the cast of TV show, Casualty.

Ellis is candid about fame and success in the tough music game, where he was managed for a while by one of the businesses most notorious, shady figures, a guy who travelled with minders and threats always close to hand. Others in the same stable included at the time, Ronnie Lane and Steve Marriot – one of the greatest British singers ever, many would say – and Ellis was one of the few prepared to challenge the guy at the time. He recalls attending court against the guy once. He took me to court, said I owed him money. I thought, what? How does this work then? I turned up at the court on a pushbike. He was there with all his, how you call them, Heavies – I knew them all and got on all right with them all. They came over to me and looked down and said,' Hey, we don't want to be here really, but don't tell him that.' I went into court, won the case, it was dismissed. He then went into a blue rage but I didn't owe him any money!"

We look back and he' agrees he never expected to be still working as a musician after all these years: "No, not really. I had a break, literally a while back after working me nuts off since I was about 15 till around '78 or '79, something like that. Towards the end, it was a bit like wading through concrete. Then I did an album with many artists, all ones I wanted on it but the two producers fell out and it never came out. I tried for about six months to get it out but gave up cos it was doing my nut in! I thought I've got to get away from all this before I go completely mad. So, I went off and got a job on the docks. Then I had me feet chopped in half – that was a really good one, that! Both of them, two ton of metal came down on them. I ended up in the air with me feet snapped in half. I had about six or seven years then out of the game. And I took up Karate, as you do," he roars with laughter."You know how it goes, get yer feet snapped in half and think, I know, I'll take up Karate, that's a good idea!"

I ask about his take on 'Handbags & Gladrags' on the new box-set, referring to Rod Stewart with whom it's often linked: "It was never his, really. I can't stand the bloke," he laughs again, adding, "all that frilly knicker stuff! No, don't start me on that one!."

Influences are still clear in his mind, with soul and blues playing a significant part in the mix: "I always listened to all that stuff, it's what I was brought up on. My father used to buy me Ray Charles albums, from the Coop, bought with Green Shield Stamps back then. I used to watch Ray Charles on Saturday night TV. I love him, I always thought he was great and then being a Mod and all that, we got into James Brown and stuff like that.Then latterly Otis Redding and all that stuff in between there. Then I got into a band, because of a dare, hanging out with them. We'd play anywhere, we were useless really but we did get better. Was the only thing that could really happen, getting better. But we'd play literally anywhere we could. We ended up playing the clubs, The Marquee, and others and we built up a reputation. We'd been so bad when we started that we had to get better or we'd have got killed!" Ellis again roars with laughter at the thought.

"We eventually got a residency at the Marquee and we did The Flamingo. We'd be there till early hours and we were all still at school. We'd be told, 'Don't tell anybody how old you are or we'll lose our licence!" I'd get back home about four in the morning, get a couple of hours kip then off to school next day! I was about 14, maybe 15, something like that! So, I cut my teeth on all that, that soul, soullie blues and rocky music. It was great, you know you were 16 and having a ball. It was like everything was exploding then in the sixties. So, it was like living the dream then going to school the next day!" Again, his laughter echoes. "You know the other kids would ask, 'What did you do last night?' I'd say, 'Well, we played the Flamingo. And they'd laugh and shake their heads. 'No, you didn't,' they'd say! It was just perfectly normal for me. It was either that or you played a lot of football, hoping to make it as a player. My old man played for Barnet Town. Half-a-Crown on a Saturday! He was mortified when I became a singer!""

"Some of it is like happy accidents, really. I never got in it cos I thought I want to be a pop-star, or I want to make a lot of money. I just got in it cos I love the music. That's the truth of it. I love singing. It just happened. I mean we were probably all robbed blind! You never made lots of money cos you just never had any! Then I ended up getting managed by Don Arden, and think, 'well, nothing's changed!'"

Ellis, in an earlier life, also fronted UK popsters, Amen Corner, under the name 'New Amen Corner,' following Andy Fairweather Low's departure from the original band. Fairweather Low, of course, has been Clapton's guitarist for past twenty years or so: "You know Andy always wanted to be a guitar player. That was all he wanted. And he's done it. He got what Weller wanted. He's a good player!"

A few years ago, in 2018, Ellis released 'Boom Bang Twang,' an album largely co-written

with Paul Well who also shares production credits with Ellis. This is included in the box-set and is a blues-cum-soul release with hints of modern Americana. As a result, Paul Weller next comes into the discussion: "He's a good lad, a talented guy. His whole reason for living, apert from his family, is music. He's got his own studio, which is good, in Woking. When he wants to get away from everything, he just goes to the studio. He's a very sort of giving sort of a bloke. He'll often say to a band, you know you can use the studio. People don't get that side of him. He used to always be tagged as the 'Angry Young Man.' I've known him for forty years; I know he's got his ways and I get them. We're not dissimilar personality-wise. I just get him and he gets me, and we get on."

"Before I did that album, Paul had sent me a track he thought I could work on, 'Cry Me A River." So, I worked on it, went up to his studio and Paul came in. So, he says, 'Why don't you do your album here?' so it went from there. He was about, he was involved big-time on about six tracks. When he wasn't about, I got on with my mates from Cow or Dream Foundry. And Mike D'Abo of the Manfreds, he sent me some songs."

Always in demand on the Sixties Band Tours, Ellis, again laughs at the idea that many of the bands on the circuit have no original band members with them."I don't really get that. If they said they was a tribute band, I get that. But…"

Another good friend, bluesman Chris Farlowe's name appears: "You know Chris can be tough. He's that kind of guy. When you're onstage, doing a show, you need a drink – just water. One night my bottle of water was gone, couldn't find it. I knew it must have been Chjris. We were on the road together. So, I went into his dressing room before the next gig, and nicked his two bottles of water. I carefully took off the caps, then superglued them back on, put them onstage, one on the rostrum and one on the keys. When Chris tried to open them, he says, 'Fuck, it's hot in here.' He does that every time. I could see by his face, he knew it was me. So, I kept well clear when he came off stage!"

We end with a laugh about an album, 'The Last Angry Man,' originally recorded many years ago, and one song from it (featured in the box-set), 'Rag & Bone Man' "It was a good song. The label took full-page ads for it, did the business, but it went absolutely nowhere. Killed stone-dead, it was. Nobody could figure out why. Then twenty years later or something, I come across something in the industry paper by a big London player back in the day called Ollie Smallman. He says the plan, a PR stunt, was to have a Rag & Bone Cart deliver the review, the promotional albums to everyone, all the radio jocks, to the BBC and all that stuff. And he says, all fine till the Cart's going round Piccadilly Circus and the horse dropped dead. So, nobody actually got the bloody thing. That was why it got no airplay or anything. Cause nobody knew about it! We'd no idea," he laughs at the memory, as we say goodbye.

JOE BONAMASSA LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

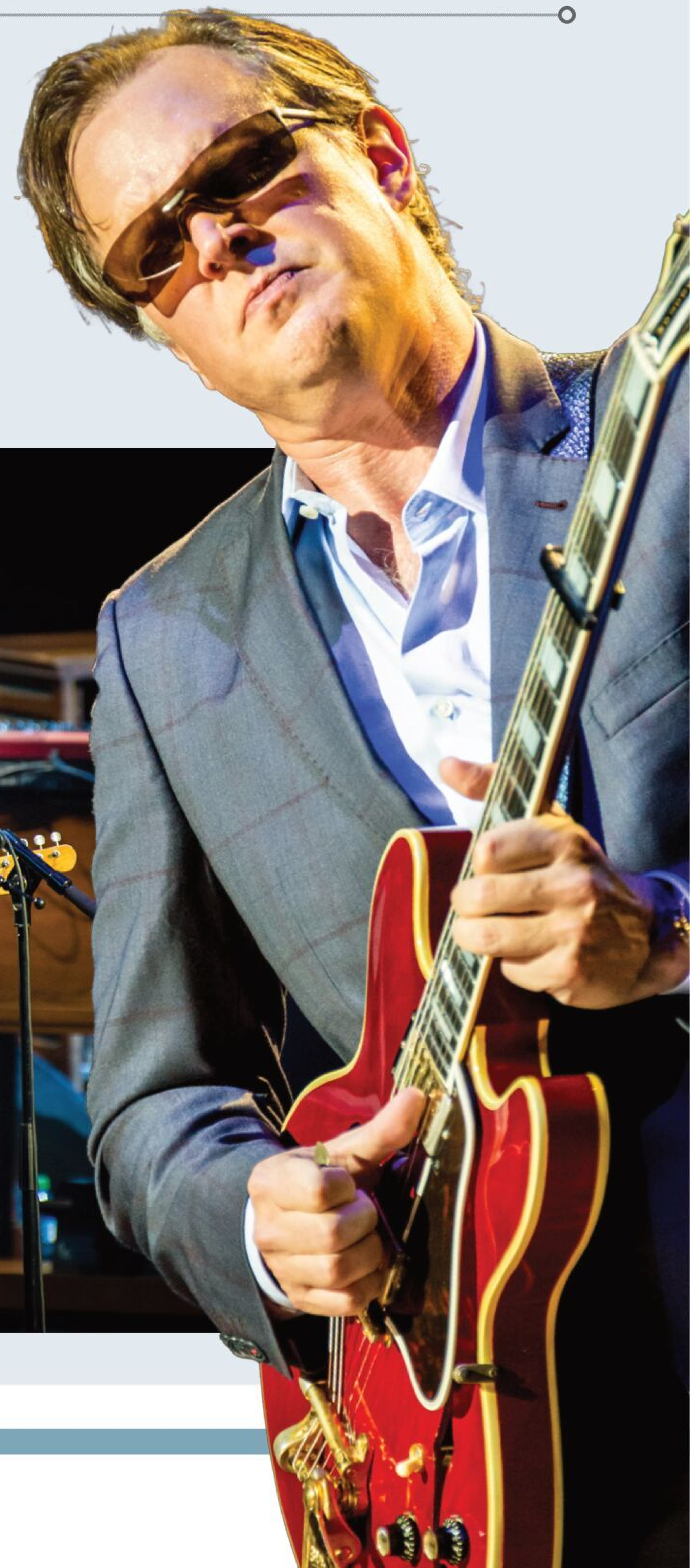
by Stephen Harrison Images: Laurence Harvey

Cometh The Hour, Cometh The Man, it has an almost biblical tone, don't you agree?

Now apply this Idiom to Joe Bonamassa appearing at The Royal Albert Hall, and you begin to get a measure in which he is held. The Royal Albert Hall is probably the most iconic venue in the music world, Eric Clapton described it as " like playing in my front room" Joe Bonamassa took to the stage dressed in a sharp blue suit and plowed straight into Evil Mamma, taken from his 2018 release, Redemption.

To kick off a gig at The Royal Albert Hall, you should be expecting to be wowed, this man never disappoints. With the almost ever-present Reese Wynans for company on keys, Joe Bonamassa produced a master class of blues and blues/rock. I've been privileged to see Joe a few times before, but in these surroundings, it was simply magnificent. Midnight Blues (Gary Moore) has long been a mainstay in the set-list.

Tonight was no different, I'm sure that Gary would be looking down with pride at the way that Joe delivers this awesome blues classic. A smaller band than we have sometimes become accustomed to, no horn section this time, however, this did not in any way shape or form detract from the evening's enjoyment. Two hours and twenty minutes later, Joe bid farewell to a very exuberant crowd that had been standing for the best part of half an hour. Two encores followed, then one of the greatest gigs that I'd ever had the pleasure of being part of was over. As I mentioned earlier, Eric Clapton has likened The Albert Hall to his front room, well Eric, move over, there is a new tenant in town.



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ROBIN TROW

Robin Trower shows absolutely no signs of mellowing or slowing down

Now in his 76th year, he is releasing a new album, No More Worlds To Conquer. By my reckoning it's the 27th under his own name and that's not counting at least five Procol Harem releases he graced with his playing from the late 60's onwards. To these ears it's his most vibrant collection of songs of recent times, opener Ball Of Fire could have sat comfortably on any of his iconic mid 70's high water mark releases. I chatted to Robin on the phone and was able to ask him about the new release, his favourite bluesmen and Gary Brooker who had recently passed just days before we spoke.

by **Steve Youglivich** Images: **Rob Blackham**

Hi Robin, it's great to speak to you.

Steve, it's a pleasure.

We need to talk about your fabulous new album, No More Worlds To Conquer. What's the main inspiration behind the album and the title?

Well, the song came about after I saw a documentary about Alexander The Great. I followed that up by reading about him and that's where that title came from. I just thought it was a good overall title for an album.

Nowadays you are certainly considered to be one of the elder statesman of the blues rock world. I wondered if that maybe was part of the thinking too.

I do like it because it sort of says nothing too much left to achieve. I like that over arching meaning for the album.

I think the album is superb. The opening track Ball Of Fire has a classic Robin Trower intro that harks back to the early RT Band albums.

I didn't set out purposely to do that. For me personally how it ends up is all about the ideas you come up with. I couldn't sit down to write a particular type of song, it's just a matter of the ideas that come. You just follow those and that's what you end up with.

I've read that most of your creations start out from you just having fun playing around with the guitar.

That's correct, yes. I always start with a guitar idea.

Do the lyrics ever come first? I think your use of language is very intelligent and very good.

Always the guitar first. I come up with a guitar part that really tickles me, I'll do some work on it until I feel I can do some good lead work with it. If it makes it that far I start working on the vocal line, the vocal melody. The lyrics then come last. Music first, that's what it's all about and then you hope that the lyric you come up with will enhance the song adding to the atmosphere or intensity of it.

The song Birdsong I know you wrote some time ago but I couldn't help but feel how much it resonates with recent events in Ukraine.

Yes I thought that myself a couple of weeks ago, it could almost be an anthem for Ukraine but in actual fact it was about the first world war, although the lyrics applies to was at any time. It's actually my personal favourite song on the album, I love the atmosphere of it.

You've not shied away from covering some slightly taboo subject matter either. I'm thinking about Deadly Kiss that explores addiction.

It's basically a friend of an addict trying to talk him out of it kinda thing. A strange subject when you think about it. I'm not sure how I got to it really, the idea came from the first couple of lines and it suited the vibe of the music, that hypnotic kind of thing and the lyric grew out of that.

I think lyrically the whole album is strong as well as musically of course. There's a couple of tracks with political observations too. The Razors Edge and Cloud Across The Sun which is a great title.

Again with those the idea just pops into your head and you think that could make a story. I'm usually led by the first couple of lines I come up with. Often there's more than one way you could go with it but you try to naturally follow the right route. I spend a lot of time with lyrics, I try to live with where I'm trying to go with it before I put too much down on paper.

Does it feel strange in any way that you have someone else then sing the lyrics or are you very comfortable with that?

No I'm good with it. The thing is some of the songs are written for Richard (Watts) to sing. Some others I was originally going to try the vocals myself but decided I wasn't up to it because of the range or whatever. Apart from the falsetto part on Deadly Kiss, Richard sings the whole of the album. He's got a wonderful voice and is a wonderful singer.

You have a superb reputation with lots of blues fans but I wonder do you consider yourself a blues player?

No, I've always considered myself a rock'n'roll player. However I do admit to having been influenced by some blues musicians. My feeling is that especially with British blues that a Brit playing blues is really rock'n'roll. Unless you've got African blood in your veins you're not going to be able to do proper blues. I don't think you can write blues songs unless you come from that background.

Do you listen to much blues music?

Yes I do. My favourite is Howlin' Wolf. He is one guy I listen to and think he has such a feel to it. He is very, very special. I love early Muddy Waters too when he was working with Willie Dixon, those songs are fantastic. I have to say, Smokestack Lightning by Howlin' Wolf, that triggered something in me. There is a muse about that, that I think feeds into Bridge Of Sighs for instance. Howlin' Wolf has such power and energy.

Can I just mention Gary Brooker, you worked with him at the beginning of your career, he must have been a big influence.

Most definitely, there's no doubt if he hadn't asked me to join Procol Harem I never would have had the career I've had. That opened the doors for me, I'll always be grateful to Gary for that. I have fond memories of those days, that was my schooling. I learned about touring in America, about albums and it was a fun time.

What prompted you to go from that into the Bridge Of Sighs era of Robin Trower?

I just started to write more and more music, that was the thing, and they needed an outlet. I thought a three piece was the right way to go.

Those first three or four albums have become iconic and stood the test of time.

Do you think so? That's probably the biggest compliment I could have. James Dewar was such a huge part of why they did so well. A very special voice, very special.

Is it correct you were in a short-lived band with Frankie Miller too?

Yes, that's where I found Jimmy. Frankie brought him in on bass and I heard him and thought Jimmy would be great and it worked out fantastically.

At the time the music press often compared you to Hendrix, how did you feel about that?

I didn't mind, it's quite something to be compared to a genius! I don't really think it was fair on him. I've always said my guitar mentors are Albert King, BB King and Hendrix, those three set the benchmark for me.

Albert King was the best guitar player I've ever seen live, his playing had some fire.

What's next for Robin Trower?

The fact is I'm getting on a bit in years, I've got enough songs written for two more albums, so my future for now is pretty mapped out. My next job is to get them down on paper. I'm in the studio again this April to make a start. Full steam ahead. I'm hoping that will be ready beginning of next year.

Was recording with Jack Bruce a landmark in your career?

The album I enjoyed most with Jack was Seven Moons, the last one. We were both pretty proud of that. Jack was dynamite to work with.

Thank you Robin for sharing such a big cross section of your career.

It's my pleasure.

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BORN UNDER A BAD SIGN
BAD DAY

by **Adam Kennedy** Images: **Lynda McKenna**

Storyville famously sang about it being "A good day for the blues". However, one British outfit is looking to flip that concept on its head. The band in question are named The Bad Day, or as they were previously known The Bad Day Blues Band.

The group itself came together quite organically. "I'd kind of given up on music when I hit my late 20s. I was like, I'm too old for this now, so I packed it in," explains Adam Rigg. "I started doing stand-up comedy for a little while, so that's what we were doing to kind of pass the time as a hobby. Me and the guitar player, we used to do that. I was no good at that, so we started going to these blues jams. We are quite good at that instead. So, we thought, let's get a band together." But what to call the band was somewhat of a conundrum. Perhaps, The Bad Day as a band name has negative connotations, but that wasn't the intention. "I think we weren't going for negative we were more going for cool."

The Bad Day are about to release their sophomore album. But this isn't just any old release. The group are preparing to unveil their new eponymous blues concept album. In the rock world, concept albums are many – you just have to look to the likes of Tommy or Quadrophenia by The Who, or The Wall by Pink Floyd. But in the blues world, this style of album is few and far between. "When we set out to do it, initially, this was just going to be our second album, it wasn't going to be a concept album," explains Rigg. "We started with a song called Devil's Lullaby, which was the first single which came out a couple of months back." However, the song catalysed the band's vision for the rest of the album. "It was kind of an argument song. These musician lovers were having an argument," explains Rigg. "We started thinking about that story a bit more, and we're like, is that the end of it with that song? It feels like there's more to be said about that story."

"Without giving the album away, you hear the breakup of the relationship - and not just the relationship. That's the obvious thing throughout that most people would probably pick up on if they're listening to the lyrics - if they care about lyrics. But the overarching theme to it is more about society," he says. "Society, in general, is a very interesting topic. If you're a non-kind of regular nine to five person, trying to fit into society, especially perhaps if you're in a relationship with someone else who also doesn't fit in that mould. You struggle in society in general. That was more of the overarching story that runs through it."

With a halt to touring and live performances, the pandemic proved to be a creative period for the confessed blues-prog-rock outfit. The band's first two albums came together during this strange time. "One of the things that the whole COVID pandemic thing did was pushed us into doing the first album, because I guess we're quite lazy, and really, we do enjoy playing live. So, we were quite happy doing tonnes and tonnes of live gigs," explains Rigg. "We were just a bit unsure about how to do the first album. Then we did get a couple of record deals with that first album. So, then that pushed that out, which probably wouldn't have happened if the pandemic hadn't happened when it did, because we would have just been too busy playing live." For The Bad Day, it was like the old analogy of waiting for a bus and then two come along at the same time. "Because of the pandemic, we weren't playing live so much. So, we had more time to write and record. The idea was quite an exciting one for us, which I think

pushed us on a bit as well," he said. "If it was a regular track album, it probably would have taken us a bit longer, because we might not have been as excited by it. But as soon as we decided that it was going to have a story and be a concept and the songs are going to flow into each other, that was quite an interesting thing for us as a band to do."

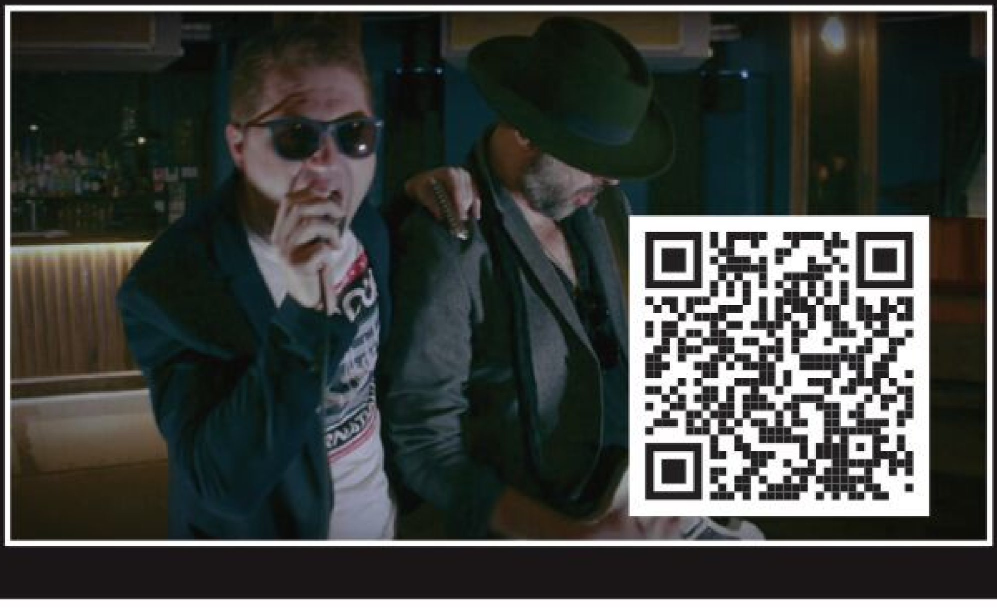
Having a concept album does introduce challenges when performing live. Such as should the album be played in full, from start to finish, or is it better to perform the album's key cuts. "To play a full album in a traditional blues venue might not be the best way," suggests Rigg. "We sometimes have split it up. We've done a couple and then we'll do a random BB King medley in the middle of it and then do something else. Genuinely, we just feel the crowd out."

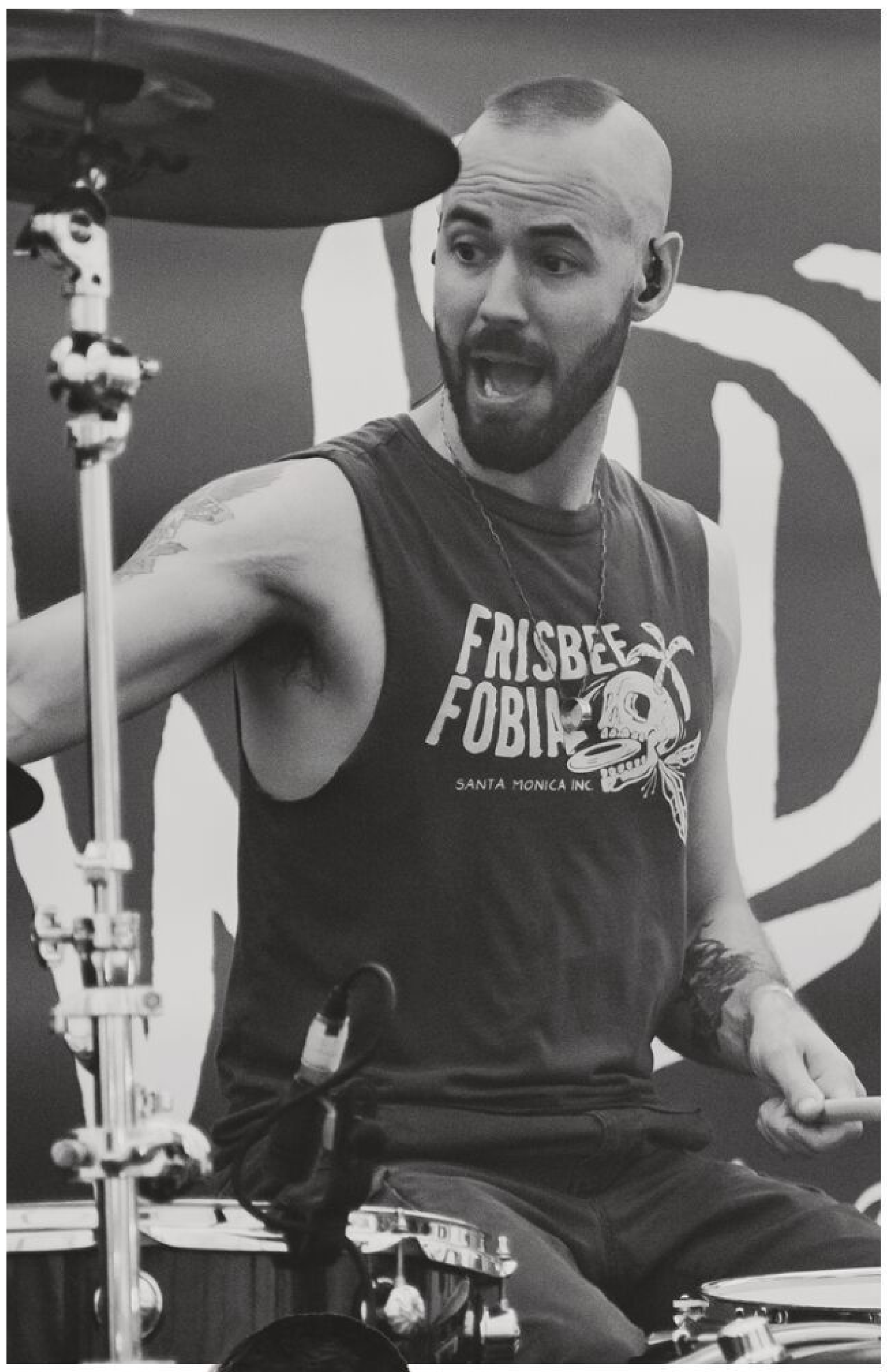
The Bad Day was compared by one commentator as being like "Springsteen meets The Clash". A diverse pairing of artists perhaps you will agree. "That was a review about Devil's Lullaby. I can see Springsteen in that because, I guess Springsteen writes story type songs a lot. And it's a story type song, so I could see that," explains Rigg. "We're quite lively as a band. I wouldn't say we were punkish. But yeah, we've got some cool moves and stuff. So maybe that's where The Clash element came in."

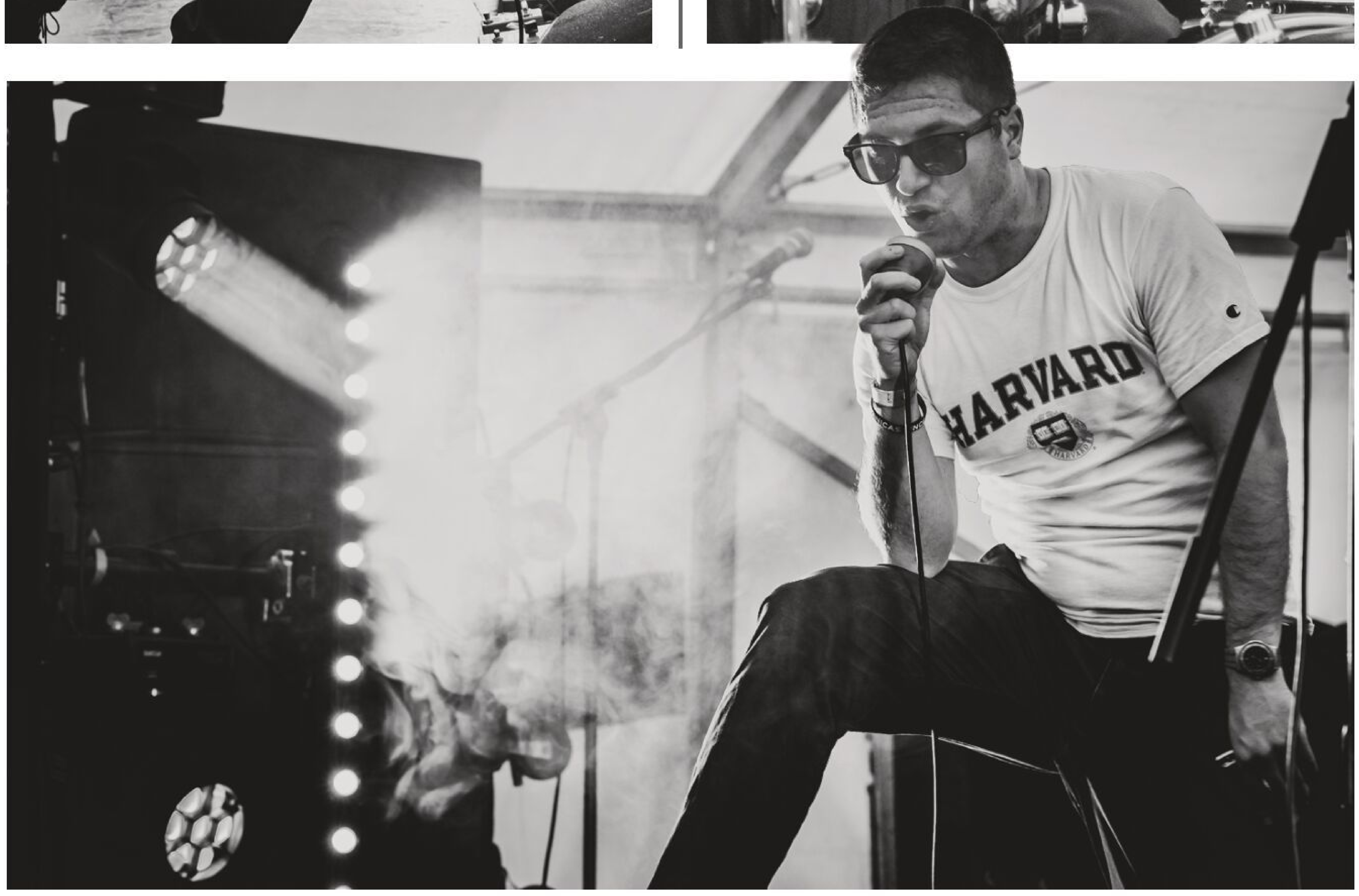
With two albums released in quick succession, The Bad Day already has their sites on making their album tally a hat trick. "Between now and June, we're writing album three, because there is a little window where we're not very busy with live stuff, the odd gig here and there. But mainly writing and recording," confirms Rigg. "Then in June, it's festivals and summer stuff. It's quite busy up until the end of the year. Then I guess album three will probably be out. I don't think we'll wait too long. I think that maybe the album will come out in the January of the next year. It's just the usual really, playing live and recording." The eponymous sophomore album from The Bad Day will be released on Friday 3rd June 2022 on Crackerjack Records.

www.bad-day.net

WATCH THE VIDEO FOR DEVIL'S LULLABY







Most Played Album Top 40 – April 2022

Collated From The Playlists Of The Independent Blues Broadcasters Association Members

Position	Artist	Album
1	IAN SIEGAL	STONE BY STONE
2	DJANGO BLACKHEART	BLUES, ROOTS & OTHER FRUITS
3	LARRY MCCRAY	BLUES WITHOUT YOU
4	KAZ HAWKINS	MY LIFE & I
5	ELIZA NEALS	BADDER TO THE BONE
6	EDGAR WINTER	BROTHER JOHNNY
7	DOM MARTIN	A SAVAGE LIFE
8	HUBERT DORIGATTI	A WALK WITH BLIND BOY
9	DANA FUCHS	BORROWED TIME
10	THE NIGHTHAWKS	ESTABLISHED 1972
11	BEAUX GRIS GRIS & THE APOCALYPSE	GOOD TIMES END TIMES
12	THE MCNAMARR PROJECT	RUN WITH ME
13	ROBERT CRAY BAND	THAT'S WHAT I HEARD
14	DOUG MACLEOD	A SOUL TO CLAIM
15	TRAVELLIN' BLUE KINGS	BENDING THE RULES
16	BONHAM-BULLICK	BONHAM-BULLICK
17	LEW JETTON & 61 SOUTH	DEJA HOODOO
18	BERNARD ALLISON	HIGHS & LOWS
19	STEVEN TROCH BAND	THE CALL
20	BLUETOUCH	THE MUSIC OF ROBERT JOHNSON
21	VANEESE THOMAS	FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT
22	MARKEY BLUE RIC LATINA PROJECT	JUMPIN' THE BROOM
23	LAURA EVANS	STATE OF MIND
24	THE BLUE CHEVYS	THE NIGHT CALLS
25	MATT PEARCE & THE MUTINY	THE SOUL FOOD STORE
26	JOE BONAMASSA	TIME CLOCKS
27	MICHAEL RUBIN	I'LL WORRY IF I WANNA
28	DELBERT MCCLINTON	OUTDATED EMOTION
29	DEAN HAITANI	RED DUST
30	KEITH THOMPSON	SMOKE & MIRRORS
31	THE WILDROOTS	WILDROOTS SESSIONS VOLUME 2
32	SON OF DAVE	CALL ME KING
33	RY COODER & TAJ MAHAL	GET ON BOARD
34	ROBIN TROWER	NO MORE WORLDS TO CONQUER
35	THE TERRAPLANES BLUES BAND	STEPPING STONES
36	EMMA WILSON	WISH HER WELL
37	BLACK PEARL	BLACK PEARL
38	BUBBA & THE BIG BAD BLUES	DRIFTING
39	BRAVE RIVAL	LIFE'S MACHINE
40	RONNIE EARL & THE BROADCASTERS	MERCY ME

DIGGIN' DEEP

Grammy nominated Blues soul artist Sugaray Rayford is back with a new release. 'In Too Deep' is a collection of poignant heartfelt and honest songs full of hope, self-reflection, and lashings of emotional lyrics. Caught up with him in his Arizona home before he went live with his online Suga Shack show.

"This is a show that started in the pandemic," he explains. "It felt good to have a break and I was isolating. I came up with the idea of doing a show. I know so many people. We've had eighty-two shows now, every Tuesday. We get a viewership of upward 2500 a week on the live stream. I couldn't believe that people didn't know who Jimmy Vivino was. I also talked to people from the theatre the likes of Felicia Fields who was in the show Color Purple before Oprah took over the role. It's been exciting. The premise was tor the audience to be the fly on the wall in the Green Room where musicians meet who haven't seen each other in a while, we're just talking. The audience can ask questions. It's kind of cool that way."

We turn to the life on the road: "Regarding touring, am not going to do 180 shows at a time. I have a younger band, amazing players, but I've learned my lesson. Touring for months is tough on these guys."

by **Colin Campbell** Images: **Allison Morgan**

Hitting the right balance between being a touring artist and home life is never easy, but Suga explains: "My wife pushed me into this. For decades she's been my Manager and knows my schedule. I love all the different countries I visit. But I'm American and don't want to think of the exchange or what I can eat. The thing you miss most touring is your own toilet! When you travel the world, you never know what you're using, Turkish toilets are…!"

To divert this conversation from becoming debased we discuss the new album, 'In Too Deep.' "When 'Somebody Save Me' came out, I was touring so hard. I sent Eric Corne the producer, ideas, but I was mentally and physically burned out. This time, my wife is doing better health wise, I'm not exhausted, so I could write some songs. We wrote this most in 2020. We saw a lot of people releasing albums. Eric and I thought no point in releasing an album if you can't tour, you're spitting in the wind. The album is well written, I have talked about things I have never done on other albums. I'm talking PTSD. The track Miss Information is not about a woman, it's a double-edged sword. Listen to the lyrics! I have a lot to say. On this album, I'm at a point in my career... Normally I don't talk Politics or Religion, but I've got something to say and I'm going to say it. 'Somebody Save Me,' was about light and dark. This one is more about love and unity, speaking the truth."

Last time we talked one of the things that resonated with me was it's easier to tell a lie than sing a lie. I suggest this seems to be a theme with the new album: "Yes, even though I've been around a long time most people don't know me as Sugaray. I've been around the blues world, and they saw me with the Mannish Boys. I was playing a role there. Even when I did my first album 'Blind Alley': It's a great album but it's not how I wanted it released. I was a young artist and had rock genre friends playing. By the time my sophomore album, 'Southside,' came out the songs on that were written for Blind Alley. I was still learning then, finding out about promoting but was happy the way the album turned out"

"Next, I did a couple of albums with the Mannish Boys and Bob Corritore. There's a secret album written with the Phantom Blues Band. I was touring and got a call to go to Italy to record an album. I didn't even know these guys but felt my wife must have worked things out. Next thing I know we're recording the album 'The World That We Live In.' This is the best album I've done. It did well in Europe but not in the States. When I met Eric Corne,

he didn't know I'd done ten albums, but I wanted to push the soul-blues thing and see what happens. I've always been a blues man but thought of bobby Womack, sometimes you have to change. I have to sing the blues the way it feels for me in 2022, not the way it was in 2013. Blues fans have to realise that other than Kingfish, because he's on the Alligator label and Bruce Iglauer is keeping him there, all the rest of us, me, Mr Sipp, Marquise Knox, we're pushing the blues a bit because this is the blues for us today! In my shows I mix traditional with West Coast swing, I'll put a Bobby Bland tune in."

" Black people come to my shows because it incorporates Gospel and traditional. White folks like rock. I began to realise there was a sub-genre to blues. There's a whole Southern-style blues thing happening. I wanted to bridge the gap, be in the middle, playing blues for black guys today. There's still a lot of racism and political pressure. But to sing like my favourite, Son House, it won't work in 2022! No matter how good they are, there's not many peoole who have jumped the train,. I have. Or picked cotton. I have. People ask, man,are you a hundred? No, I'm from East Texas."
"When I grew up, the rest of the world was moving; where I lived it didn't. Even today. It may be 2022 in the rest of the world, but you move back to 1965 in East Texas."

A history lesson about the lone star state ensues and the difference in rules in that State compared to others: "Here we are in 2022 and they are trying to ban abortion! But that's Texas! I hope it's going to change. I moved to Arizona!"

We talk about some tracks on the new album. The title track is fuzzy and distorted. "We caught Bobby Womack style guitar tone on that."

"People don't realise when they leave my show, I'm awake until 5 in the morning because the PTSD kept me awake." This is a reference to the lyrics of Invisible Soldier.

"United We Stand' is a favourite of mine, the last track. I wanted this to be upbeat. There's a lot of heavy tracks on the album. We bury deep conver-

> *It has to be felt and raw*

sations in music. So, we hoped people would start listening to the album happy and ending happy. I wanted to lift it up. Last track feels real."

"I'm amazed how well the track 'Miss Information' has been received as a single. Over 500,000 spins. I was top of the Apple Charts as well. There are more young people listening to my music."

"I hope this album does as well as the last. I was on stage in France, Willie J Campbell called me wishing me congratulations on the Grammy nomination. I thought he was joking! Then my wife called me, that's when I knew they were not joking! I did the Blues Cruise instead of attending the Grammys, I sent Eric and his wife! I told him we don't have the money to win, we can't pay for that publicity and coverage. Not that my album wasn't good enough to win. The voting members are from all over. People still don't know who I am but it's true. We're trying now to push outside the blues world. We had a lot of Festivals to play that were not just blues. The album is truth, I got to write on a couple of tracks. I felt more connected to this album."

"When making the album, Eric sent me a sketch with him humming the melody. I sent my thoughts back and he got a band together. Usually, they end up tracking three or four a day, then Eric puts in strings or whatever at the end. This time it was great to have me there, I was more hands on! Eric then put vocals on. He knows the lyrics and vocal sensitivity means a lot! It's usually a one take for me when doing a song although I do them about four times. The track, 'Please Take My Hand,' was one take. A song like that is the blues side. It's not supposed to be perfect; it has to be felt and raw, you don't want to over-produce such a song. I'm figuring out how to do this song live; something like Death Letter acapella. I never played with a set list; I just went where my heart felt. If the mood was right, I'd stop and do 'Wonderful World.' I think I'll only sing this song in an intimate venue!"

"With this album, I wanted it to feel black without being racist; something for the soul community. Usually when I write a song, a movie goes on in my head. This album has become my favourite album. There are eight songs here I will play live as long as I'm a front man in the band. I usually take three or four songs from each album and play them in a set, or some covers. The lyrics are deep on some songs, but another uplifting song is 'Gonna Lift You Up,' I want to project love and unity on this one. I love everybody - unless you give me a reason not to love you! I don't care what colour you are. I was raised that way. I want to be remembered for giving out love and respect and honesty! I don't do concerts, I do parties. At some point people may cry but mostly I want people laughing and dancing!"

Regarding demographics Suga is seeing a younger audience at his concerts. He cites Prince as an influencer as well as Joe Bonamassa: "Prince never let any of the record companies pigeonhole his music, so he had fans of eighteen- and eighty-one-year-olds. I love that. It comes from people in the audience liking you for being you, not the genre. I have to overcome this with some of my blues cats. You want your audience to follow you because you're you. Whatever you play is going to be real. But if you only play for a straight blues or soul audience, they're only going to be one of two things. Sometimes during my sets, I do crazy things like playing 'Comfortably Numb' because I want them to be surprised! Got to keep pushing until my song is the cover someone wants to play. That's the way the game goes."

Closing, Suga has the last input: "Please be good to one another and to yourself."

For more information, see website:

sugarayrayford.com

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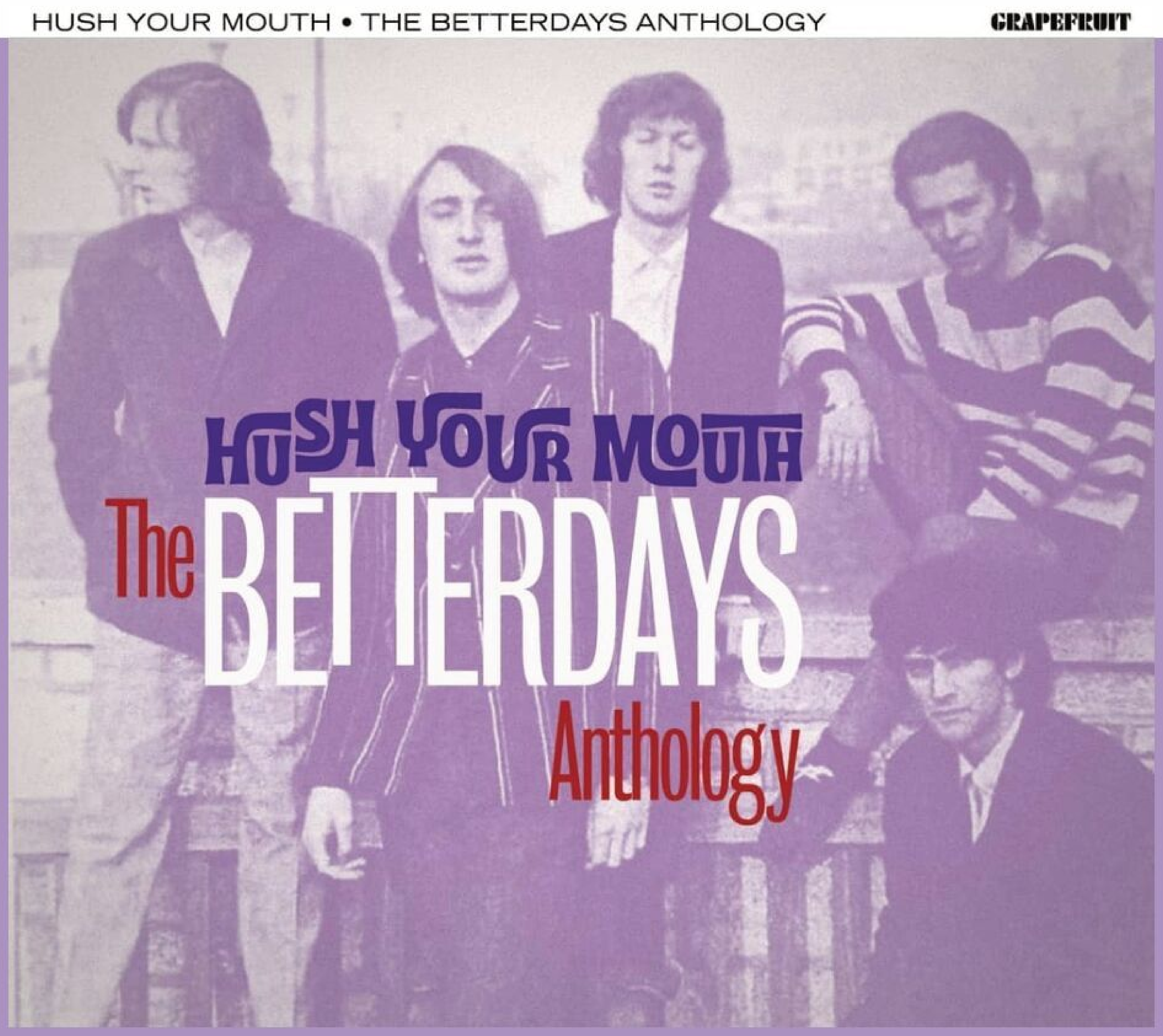

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★★★★★

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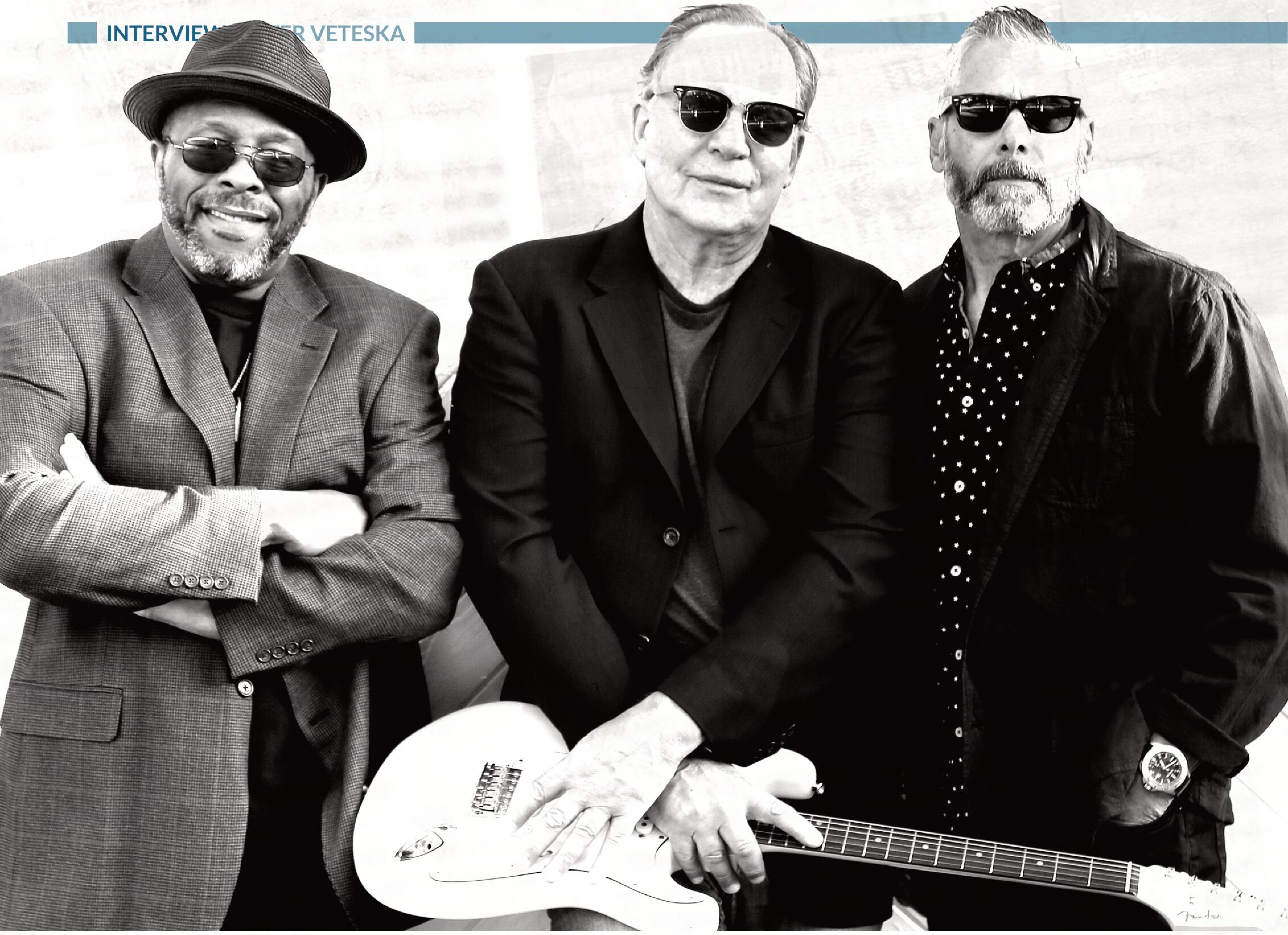


PETER VETESKA

SO FAR SO GOOD

by **Stephen Harrison** Images: **Patricia Martz**

So Far So Good is the latest album from Peter Veteska &The Blues Train. I had the pleasure of reviewing it for this magazine, as I had done so with a previous couple of albums. It was good to finally get to talk to Peter, albeit via zoom, as we have long corresponded on social media.

I caught up with him at his girlfriend's house in New Jersey, just a few hundred yards from the beach on a bright and sunny day. A laid-back ambiance for a chat about all things blues and beyond.

We start chatting about the latest album, currently running No 1 in many blues charts, in America, Europe and the UK:

"I didn't want to rush the recording because if you record a whole album in a certain time frame, you capture everything in such a short space of time, so dragged it out from January 2021, to around August of the same year. I allowed myself to experience different things and get into different frames of mind, encompass life experiences as well," he explains.
As we all know, the world was in a very different state of mind when the band started writing and recording the album. Not just in America but all around the world which placed bands in uncharted waters: "I wanted to do something that was uplifting and happy," he says.

When I sat down to listen to the album, I found not only blues, but funk, and soul, all close bedfellows; so, I put it to Peter that this was where the uplifting vibe had surfaced from when he started writing the songs:
" Well, yes and no, because as I was taking a couple of these songs to record and lay down, I'm always driven by rhythm, and there are many different types of that. You have Chicago, Mississippi, New Orleans, and the East Coast; all have a sense of rhythm but they all approach it in their own way, I tried to create a little of everything."

The CD tells a story with the first track depicting a hard-hitting storyline with twists and turns as the album progresses. Having listened to Peter's work over the last few years, his explanation behind the writing process and getting to the end result makes so much sense. This is not just a blues artist who writes, records, and puts out an album. This is an artist who thinks about how each song will work best within the finished article.
"I had a lot of music floating around way before I started writing the album. I knew that I

wanted to get more music out."
As with any artist when they put out a new album, especially before the pandemic came along, they are eager to take it out on the road. The last couple of years have devastated live music globally. it's only now that things are slowly opening up for everyone. The burning question is, what are the chances of gigs in Europe and the UK?

"We would absolutely love to do some shows in the UK and the surrounding countries. it's something I'm working very hard on to happen. The success of this album is certainly helping matters. In January, the album charted No 1 on all the radio charts over here, as well as in the UK. So who knows, that could help us a lot. I've been talking to DJs over there and, hopefully, all of these factors can help us get over to tour. I'm working very hard on that."

Veteska believes a tour will allow The Blues Train as featured on the albums to also make the trip - which pleases me no end, because they are such a tight unit and bring so much to each album.

As we have grown to know each other over time, Peter and I have interacted on social media about our shared love of blues music. We also share a deep love and respect for Led Zeppelin. Zeppelin was responsible for my introduction to blues at around 13 years old. It turned out that around the same age, Peter was also being turned on to everything Zeppelin:

"When I was a kid learning guitar, around 13-14, Jimmy Page had a really big influence on me and my playing. He was a great session musician and a great innovative guitarist. At the same time, I was a huge Eric Clapton fan, his work with Derek And The Dominoes, and of course Cream. The first Zeppelin album is pure blues, all the way, man. I was the youngest of five siblings, so I would listen to what my brothers and sisters were listening to, so when I heard, How Many More Times, it completely blew me away".

I'm eager to hear what the gig situation is like now in America. Over here in the UK things are opening up, gigs are coming thick and fast for bands, but there is still a lot of nervousness and trepidation around, especially with indoor gigs. Even as late as November 2021 gigs were being cancelled at short notice.
"Yeah, things are opening up. Things are happening. We've got a couple of gigs lined up, one of them, we are headling the biggest blues festival in New Jersey, so we're really pleased about that. The more people that get to see us play gets my adrenaline flowing. The northeast coast has a few very good blues festivals coming up."

Up until the age of around 14, Peter grew up in Queens, New York, where there was more of a rock/blues scene going on. More Led Zeppelin than Muddy Waters shall we say:
"As I grew older, I began to realize that these were 3rd and 4th generation people. This had all started with Robert Johnson and Son House, people like that. There was a period around that time when blues almost disappeared completely. So, my favourite blues bands at that time were Ten Years After, and The Allman Brothers Band, although they weren't strictly die-hard blues bands, they did play a lot of blues. I was a big fan of both in my early years."

> ***it may be totally different from what I have in my mind right now***

Talking to Peter, I have the distinct feeling that he and I were listening to the same stuff at around the same time, which led us both down the path towards finding our blues haven. The place where we both need to be, the place where you begin to understand and learn and feel blues music. Something that stays with you for the rest of your life. During the period of lockdown, the world of live music and recording music ground to a halt all around the world. When things started to open up, confidence began returning among musicians, everyone was all of a sudden raring to go. There was so much energy and enthusiasm from musicians everywhere to start recording and playing live once again. Veteska confirms it was the same for him: "I think it was easier because people were more available. I have a lot of guests on this album, only because I thought it was a good idea to include a lot of different people from different states, New York and New Jersey. So, we had a lot of different flavours on the album, but we still retained the integrity of what The Blues Train is all about."

The album, 'So Far So Good, ' has only been officially available for nine weeks now. But in that short time, the album has hit No 1 on all the blues charts, both here and in America. When I first got sent a copy by Peter to review it for Blues Matters Magazine, I had a gut reaction, a feeling that this would be really successful. Personally, I think that this album will thrust Peter and The Blues Train further than theymay have imagined. The overall production is largely down to Peter himself, and the people he surrounds himself with are all long-time associates, so they all come from the same place musically and artistically.

"This album has got some life to it, some definite energy, but I'm already starting to plan stuff for the next album. I'll probably start working on that in the new year. But by the time the new year has arrived, I'll have different ideas, I'll have heard different things, so it may be totally different from what I have in my mind right now. What I'm really focusing on right now is getting over to England and possibly Europe so that we can present the album to a whole new audience. That would be so great if we manage to pull it off. "
We continue chatting about artists and songs, albums that had a profound effect on both of us. It was like talking to an old friend you hadn't seen in a long time. Just recalling seminal moments that mean so much to each of us musically.

"Alvin Lee and The Allman Brothers had the biggest effect on my career," he says before adding, "unfortunately, just as I picked up a guitar as a kid, Duanne Allman had passed away about a year earlier. My sister's boyfriend turned me on to him. The slide guitar that he perfected was like nothing I'd ever heard before - that's what really blew me away. It was so powerful. That helped my tastes expand musically which led me into Cream, Eric Clapton, Led Zeppelin. All of their blues stuff hit me."

By this time, we have almost come full circle, two friends reminiscing, reliving our youth and what led us to where we are now. The path of a blues artist is littered with a million thoughts about the early years of the blues, what it means, what it means to you personally. You gotta know where you come from in order to know where you are going. Peter Veteska certainly knows where he comes from, he knows where he is going. He'll follow the path of the blues wherever it may lead.

peterveteskabluestrain.com

LIVE MUSIC

SAMANTHA FISH

15 OCT	OXFORD O2 ACADEMY2	OXFORD
16 OCT	MANCHESTER ACADEMY 2	MANCHESTER
18 OCT	BRIGHTON CHALK	BRIGHTON
19 OCT	EDINBURGH QUEENS HALL	EDINBURGH
20 OCT	WOLVERHAMPTON KK'S STEEL MILL	WOLVERHAMPTON
21 OCT	GLASGOW SAINT LUKE'S	GLASGOW
22 OCT	SOUTHAMPTON BROOK	SOUTHAMPTON
23 OCT	NOTTINGHAM ROCK CITY	NOTTINGHAM
24 OCT	CARDIFF TRAMSHED	CARDIFF
25 OCT	NEWCASTLE WYLAM BREWERY	NEWCASTLE
26 OCT	LONDON O2 SHEPHERDS BUSH EMPIRE	LONDON
27 OCT	BATH KOMEDIA	BATH

ROBIN TROWER

23 JUN	BILSTON ROBIN	BILSTON
23 JUN	WOLVERHAMPTON ROBIN 2	WOLVERHAMPTON
24 JUN	HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME	HOLMFIRTH
26 JUN	LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON

TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND

02 NOV	THE HELIX	DUBLIN, IE
04 NOV	THE LONDON PALLADIUM	LONDON
05 NOV	THE LONDON PALLADIUM	LONDON
06 NOV	THE LONDON PALLADIUM	LONDON
09 NOV	MANCHESTER ACADEMY	MANCHESTER
10 NOV	O2 ACADEMY GLASGOW	GLASGOW

"KINGFISH" INGRAM

08 JUN	SAINT LUKE'S	GLASGOW
09 JUN	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON

STARLITE CAMPBELL BAND

06 SEP	THE CRAFTY BAA	KESWICK
07 SEP	THE CRAFTY BAA	WINDERMERE
10 SEP	GREYSTONES	SHEFFIELD
13 SEP	RED ARROW MUSIC CLUB	RAMSGATE

EMMA WILSON

16 SEP	CHELMSFORD SOCIAL CLUB	CHELSFORD
18 NOV	TEMPERANCE	LEAMINGTON SPA
19 NOV	TENBY BLUES FESTIVAL 2022	TENBY
20 NOV	WHITBY BLUES FESTIVAL 2022	WHITBY
09 APR	HRH BLUES FESTIVAL 2023	SHEFFIELD

SAMANTHA FISH IN NYC: by Crios Photography

KING KING

28 JUL	LOWTHER PAVILION	LYTHAM
29 JUL	HOLMFIRTH PICTURE DROME	HOLMFIRTH
30 JUL	CASTLETON PEAK CAVERN	CASTLETON
30 JUL	CASTLETON THE DEVILS ARSE	CASTLETON
14 AUG	FIRESTORM ROCK FESTIVAL 2022	STOCKPORT
20 AUG	CHEPSTOW CASTLE	CHEPSTOW
16 OCT	NORTHAMPTON ROADMENDER	NORTHAMPTON
20 OCT	SOUTHAMPTON 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
21 OCT	HANGER 34	LIVERPOOL
17 NOV	BELFAST EMPIRE MUSIC HALL	BELFAST

KING KING in EDINBURGH: by Ian Potter

2023 DATES TO WATCH...

BETH HART

05 MAR	BELFAST ULSTER HALL	BELFAST
07 MAR	GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL	GLASGOW
09 MAR	BIRMINGHAM SYMPHONY HALL	BIRMINGHAM
11 MAR	SHEFFIELD CITY HALL	SHEFFIELD
13 MAR	MANCHESTER BRIDGEWATER HALL	MANCHESTER
15 MAR	NEWCASTLE NEWCASTLE CITY HALL	NEWCASTLE
17 MAR	LONDON PALLADIUM	LONDON
18 MAR	LONDON PALLADIUM	LONDON
21 MAR	BRIGHTON DOME	BRIGHTON

WHEN RIVERS MEET

14 OCT	CARDIFF CLWB IFOR BACH	CARDIFF
16 OCT	GLOUCESTER GUILDHALL	GLOUCESTER
21 OCT	HUDDERSFIELD PARISH	HUDDERSFIELD
23 OCT	YORK CRESCENT	YORK
29 OCT	LIVERPOOL ARTS CLUB	LIVERPOOL
30 OCT	MILTON KEYNES STABLES	MILTON KEYNES

ERIC GALES

02 JUN	LEAMINGTON SPA ASSEMBLY	LEAMINGTON SPA
04 JUN	CHESTER LIVE ROOMS	CHESTER
05 JUN	YORK CRESCENT	YORK
06 JUN	NEWCASTLE CLUNY	NEWCASTLE
07 JUN	BURY MET THEATRE	BURY
08 JUN	HAMPSHIRE HAYMARKET THEATRE	HAMPSHIRE
08 JUN	BASINGSTOKE HAYMARKET	BASINGSTOKE

WALTER TROUT

13 JUN	CHESTER LIVE ROOMS	CHESTER
14 JUN	BUXTON OPERA HOUSE	BUXTON
16 JUN	BRIGHTON CONCORDE 2	BRIGHTON
17 JUN	LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL	LONDON
18 JUN	HOLMFIRTH PICTUREDROME	HOLMFIRTH
19 JUN	EDINBURGH STRAMASH	EDINBURGH
20 JUN	BURY ST EDMUNDS APEX	BURY ST EDMUNDS
21 JUN	FROME CHEESE AND GRAIN	FROME
22 JUN	SOUTHAMPTON 1865	SOUTHAMPTON
19 MAY	GATESHEAD SAGE	GATESHEAD

KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD

15 OCT	BRISTOL O2 ACADEMY	BRISTOL
16 OCT	BEXHILL ON SEA DE LA WARR PAVILION	BEXHILL ON SEA
18 OCT	LONDON O2 SHEPHERDS BUSH EMPIRE	LONDON
20 OCT	WARRINGTON PYRAMID AND PARR HALL	WARRINGTON
21 OCT	EDINBURGH QUEENS HALL	EDINBURGH
22 OCT	SHEFFIELD O2 ACADEMY	SHEFFIELD
23 OCT	NEWCASTLE TYNE THEATRE	NEWCASTLE

FESTIVALS

DIGGLE BLUES FESTIVAL
SADDLEWORTH, OLDHAM
16TH – 19TH JUNE WWW.DIGGLEBLUESFESTIVAL.CO.UK

BURTON AGNES JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL
DRIFFIELD, EAST YORKSHIRE
8TH – 10TH JULY WWW.BURTONAGNES.COM

RYE INTERNATIONAL JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL
CALLOW END, WORCESTERSHIRE
25TH – 29TH AUG WWW.RYEJAZZ.COM

RED ROOSTER FESTIVAL
EUSTON HALL, EUSTON, SUFFOLK
2ND – 4TH JUNE WWW.REDROOSTER.ORG.UK

WE ARE BACK FESTIVAL
THE CLUNY, NEWCASTLE
15TH – 17TH JULY WWW.THECLUNY.COM

CALLANDER JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL
CALLANDER, SCOTLAND
30TH SEP – 2ND OCT WWW.SWANAGE-BLUES.ORG

ALFOLD ROCK & BLUES FESTIVAL
SPRINGBOK ESTATE, ALFOLD, SURREY
1ST – 3RD JULY ALFOLDROCKBLUES.COM

UPTON BLUES FESTIVAL
UPTON UPON SEVERN, WORCESTERSHIRE
15TH – 17TH JULY WWW.UPTON-BLUES-FESTIVAL.CO.UK

THE 36TH SWANAGE BLUES FESTIVAL
DORSET, ENGLAND
6TH – 9TH OCT WWW.SWANAGE-BLUES.ORG

LINTON FESTIVAL 20TH ANNIVERSARY
ROSS-ON-WYE
1ST – 3RD JULY WWW.LINTONFESTIVAL.ORG

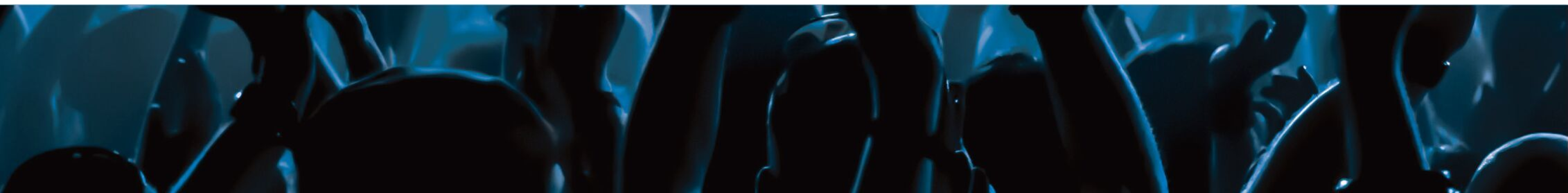
EDINBURGH JAZZ & BLUES FESTIVAL
EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND
15TH – 24TH JULY WWW.EDINBURGHJAZZFESTIVAL.COM

FORM CARLISLE BLUES/ ROCK FESTIVAL
CARLISLE, ENGLAND
7TH – 9TH OCT CARLISLEBLUESFESTIVAL.COM/TICKETS

DEREHAM BLUES FESTIVAL
NORFOLK
6TH – 10TH JULY WWW.DEREHAMBLUESFESTIVAL.ORG.UK

OLD BUSH BLUES FESTIVAL
CALLOW END, WORCESTERSHIRE
19TH – 21ST AUG WWW.OLDBUSHBLUES.CO.UK

ALL INFORMATION CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRINT. PLEASE CHECK WITH THE VENUES BEFORE TRAVELLING OR BOOKING HOTELS



RMR TOP 50

ROOTS MUSIC REPORT'S BLUES ALBUM CHART

POS	ARTIST	ALBUM	LABEL
1	TINSLEY ELLIS	DEVIL MAY CARE	ALLIGATOR
2	KEB MO	GOOD TO BE...	ROUNDER
3	SUGARAY RAYFORD	IN TOO DEEP	FORTY BELOW
4	PETER VETESKA & BLUES TRAIN	SO FAR SO GOOD	BLUE HEART
5	TRUDY LYNN	GOLDEN GIRL	NOLA BLUE
6	ALBERT CASTIGLIA	I GOT LOVE	GULF COAST
7	BOB STROGER & THE HEADCUTTERS	THAT'S MY NAME	DELMARK
8	THE LOVE LIGHT ORCHESTRA	LEAVE THE LIGHT ON	NOLA BLUE
9	HURRICANE RUTH	HURRICANE RUTH: LIVE AT 3RD AND LINDSLEY(LIVE)	SELF-RELEASE
10	JOHN MAYALL	THE SUN IS SHINING DOWN	FORTY BELOW
11	CAROLYN WONDERLAND	TEMPTING FATE	ALLIGATOR
12	KATHY MURRAY & THE KILOWATTS	FULLY CHARGED	BLUE HEART
13	DUKE ROBILLARD	THEY CALLED IT RHYTHM & BLUES	STONY PLAIN
14	SCOTT ELLISON	THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE NIGHT	LIBERATION HALL
15	BUBBA AND THE BIG BAD BLUES	DRIFTING	FULLERTON GOLD
16	MISS BIX	BRING IT	BLUE HEART
17	BERNARD ALLISON	HIGHS & LOWS	RUF
18	VANEESE THOMAS	FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT	BLUE HEART
19	DIUNNA GREENLEAF	I AIN'T PLAYIN'	LITTLE VILLAGE
20	GOV'T MULE	HEAVY LOAD BLUES	CONCORD
21	MIKE GULDIN	TUMBLIN'	BLUE HEART
22	THE SULLY BAND	LET'S STRAIGHTEN IT OUT!	BLU ELAN
23	MISTY BLUES	ONE LOUDER	LUNARIA
24	TOMMY CASTRO	TOMMY CASTRO: A BLUESMAN CAME TO TOWN	ALLIGATOR
25	SUE FOLEY	PINKY'S BLUES	STONY PLAIN
26	POPA CHUBBY	EMOTIONAL GANGSTER	DIXIEFROG
27	ERIC GALES	CROWN	PROVOGUE
28	VAL STARR & THE BLUES ROCKET	HEALING KIND OF BLUES	SANDWICH FACTORY
29	JOSE RAMIREZ	MAJOR LEAGUE BLUES(FEAT. JIMMY JOHNSON)	DELMARK
30	HOROJO TRIO	SET THE RECORD	STONY PLAIN
31	CHRISTONE "KINGFISH" INGRAM	662	ALLIGATOR
32	LARRY MCCRAY	BLUES WITHOUT YOU	KTBA
33	DAVID LUMSDEN	ROOTED IN THE BLUES	SELF-RELEASE
34	KENNY "BLUES BOSS" WAYNE	BLUES FROM CHICAGO TO PARIS	STONY PLAIN
35	DION	STOMPING GROUND	KTBA
36	DELBERT MCCLINTON	OUTDATED EMOTION	HOT SHOT
37	COLIN JAMES	OPEN ROAD	STONY PLAIN
38	TIM GARTLAND	TRUTH	SELF-RELEASE
39	RONNIE EARL & THE BROADCASTERS	MERCY ME	STONY PLAIN
40	MISSISSIPPI HEAT	MADELEINE	VAN DER LINDEN
41	MARKEY BLUE RIC LATINA PROJECT	JUMPIN' THE BROOM	SOULOSOUND
42	EDGAR WINTER	BROTHER JOHNNY	QUARTO VALLEY
43	CHICKENBONE SLIM	SERVE IT TO ME HOT	VIZZTONE
44	DANA FUCHS	BORROWED TIME	RUF
45	ANGELA EASLEY	RISE	CLASS A
46	NORTH MISSISSIPPI ALLSTARS	SET SAIL	NEW WEST
47	PROFESSOR LOUIE & THE CROWMATIX	STRIKE UP THE BAND	WOODSTOCK
48	KATIE HENRY	ON MY WAY	RUF
49	BOBBY GENTILO	GENTILO	BLUE HEART
50	REGINA BONELLI	TRUTH HURTS	TRUE GROOVE

LAURA EVANS

She might be currently unaware, but as a singer/actress Laura Evans is following in the footsteps of a long lineage of famous performers. This wonderful Welsh songstress is treading a path similar to those who have tripped the light fantastic of stardom's duality by balancing both stage and studio roles in the manner of Dolly Parton, Cher, and Barbara Streisand to name a few.

by **Paul Davies** Images: **Rob Blackham**

As a well-known and in demand actress who appeared as the character Madison Square Garden in the much-loved The Basil 'Boom-Boom' Brush Show, Laura released her initial five-track EP in 2020. It included her hit song 'Running Back To You' which went straight to number one on the UK iTunes Blues chart. It also grazed the US top fifty Blues Chart slotting in at a respectable number 43. In doing so, this raised her personable profile on both sides of the Atlantic.

If looks can reflect a voice, then Evans' elfin countenance and vivacious nature are translated by her gossamer-light, joyful tone - even when she sings about personal heartbreak- that soars and flutters like a rare and dazzling creature caught in radiant, golden sunlight. Raised in Aberdare, Wales, this petite in stature but hugely talented artist has recorded her debut album release 'State Of Mind'. The first single culled from the album is 'I'm Alright' which heralds in her penchant for a country-blues feel and for further tuneful treasures to be discovered on her inaugural album release. Laura explains how she came up with the idea for the album's first single, 'I'm Alright', whilst on a plane journey to Greece: "The verse and melody came so quickly, it was like they fell out of the sky," she recalls. She was excited enough by her mid-air inspiration to take it to this record's producer Josiah J Manning of the Kris Barras Band. Laura says the true message of the song is about "strength." She continues: "Sometimes when we're at breaking point, we just have to put on a brave face, face the world and say, "I'm alright", I've got through a lot of bad days with this motto as I'm sure many other people have. I know people will relate to this song and hopefully feel empowered."

Hooking up with part polymath producer and musician Josiah J Manning seems to have given Laura the fillip she needed to realise her full potential and record an album of songs of which she is rightly proud: "I met Josiah about two years ago. My management introduced me to him. I had a bunch of songs ready to record and they said I should work with him," she continues, "so I put an EP together and we were just figuring out my sound. We did a lot of soul searching and listening to a

bunch of stuff." Laura elaborates upon the age-old opposites attract maxim in musical form: "We come from different backgrounds because he's into heavy rock and I'm more like blues-country; it was amazing because he plays everything. I would get in the room and sing my songs and then we would build the track together. After I made the EP, we kind of nailed my sound and it was a no brainer that I was going to make my album with him."

Blessed with an engaging sunny side up demeanour, she happily tells me all about the working process she and Josiah employed to define her sound: "It was important for me not to sound like everyone else and do what everyone else is doing," explains Laura. "I'm a storyteller, so lyrics are particularly important to me. I like to think every song on this album has its own story. I love big vocals, big choruses, strong melodies and pushing myself out of my comfort zone when it comes to recording my vocals, too. I'm also a sucker for a ballad, so I had to check in with myself and pick my favourite ballads sparingly so that the album was well balanced. It was imperative that each song on the album makes you feel something and moves you. I'm staying true to who I am as an artist."

Song titles such as 'Good At Getting Over You', 'Let You Down Easy', 'Mess Of Me' and 'Drag Me Back' suggest an autobiographical nature to her songwriting as Laura sets the record straight: "I always tend to write from personal experience. There are a couple of songs on there though that aren't. I got a bit carried away with one song which is called 'Gone'. It is the last but one track. I just kind of wrote a song about a girl on the run after I'd been watching a Netflix show but that's not autobiographical because I'm not on the run or anything. But most of the songs... I don't know, I'm a bit like, I've had a lot of heartbreak and I travelled a lot and music's like therapy. So, if anything bad happens in my life I usually write about it, and it makes me feel better." Staying true to herself as an artist is something that drives Laura onwards: "Yeah, definitely. I've always sung. I've always felt I had a voice and when I was in my teens, I felt like I had something to say but I didn't really know how to say it. So, I just kept trying so many ways. I've got in rooms with lots of writers and I made it my aim to become a better songwriter. I feel like I finally nailed my sound and with the kind of stuff I write I feel like you can tell that it's my song."

Her musical influences and idols are those who have cultivated a career with integrity at the heart of their work such as Bonnie Raitt, Janis Joplin, BB King, Eric Clapton, and Dolly Parton: "I listen to a bit of everything. But I think a lot of stuff is rooted in the blues. I like a lot of crossover music like 'Piece Of My Heart'", sung by Janis Joplin when with Big Brother And The Holding Company, it's a song that's clearly had a huge effect on Laura as she declares: "That was a kind of rock song, but it crossed over and a lot of that stuff I love." It's capturing this crossover appeal that inspires Laura forward on her musical travels to a similar high status and 'State Of Mind' contains a good share of such moments with 'I'm Alright's' boogie riff, the slide blues of 'Solo', 'Fire With Fire's ' big blues riff and the rocked up feel to the album's title track. All of which are graced by Laura Evans' stand out vocal style. Talking about crossover musical stylings, there's a definite modern country, blues, and rock Nashville sound running through the grooves of the eleven tracks that will appeal to a large fanbase. In fact, Laura has already played at Nashville's famed Bluebird Cafe: "I've been to Nashville several times, actually. But you know, I've concluded that I could write anywhere. I don't need to be in Nashville to write but it's an amazing and magical place where everyone is a musician."

Like live music nights in Nashville's honky-tonk bars, Laura recalls how she found her voice and began singing live: "I was about 18 and it was in London because I went to school there, and I went to this open mic night and there was a blues band jamming on the stage. They were calling people up. I was with my sister, and I just got up and I jammed a song that nobody knew, and the band just went with me."

"if anything bad happens in my life I usually write about it, and it makes me feel better"

She lets out an endearing chuckle at this wistful down the wind memory. "We were in the middle of Notting Hill, and I was this little Welsh girl and, I don't know where I got the confidence to do it, but something in me was like I have to get up. After I got off the stage, everyone came up to me saying, 'Wow, that's so cool', and I thought then that I should do this more." From this impulsive moment, Laura caught the live singing bug: "I didn't really know what I was doing, to be honest, I just kind of ripped some melodies and had some lyrics and the band just went with me and it was a cool moment. Someone came up to me afterwards and tried to book me for a gig and I was like 'yeah, I should do this'. Or at least try!"

And if at first you do succeed, then the compulsion to repeat the adrenaline buzz of live performance is something that Laura is looking forward to doing again on her upcoming live dates as she reveals: "Josiah is heading up the band and I've got a lovely girl Daisy Pepper on bass and Joe Harris on drums. So, it's quite small, but it's a perfect kind of rootsy organic sound for the tracks." Perfectly petite, rootsy and organic is as good a description of Laura Evans as it is about her music. After all, it's all about the state of mind.

Laura's debut album "State of Mind" is out July 1st.

thelauraevans.com

OUT OF
CURIOSITY

STARLITE CAMPBELL BAND

It's a rare thing nowadays to have a blues band consisting of a man and wife. But this is exactly what you have with The Starlite-Campbell Band. The couple have just released their brand new album, The Language Of Curiosity. Now resident in Portugal, by the magic of the internet, I caught up with them in their recording studio/ home and chatted about relevant stuff.

by Stephen Harrison Images: Paul Husband

They had earlier in the day been sorting through photos that they had done to be on the front cover of this magazine, our first issue in the A4 format: " We.ve been going through all the results of the photoshoot and trying to agree on our best one for the cover pic, so we are pretty much sorted with that now. It's been a little intense but it's done now."

The Language Of Curiosity is not your run of the mill blues title for an album, but Starlite-Campbell is not your run of the mill blues band. Both Suzy (Starlite) and Simon (Campbell) have a deep love and respect for blues music, they also draw outside the blues well when writing and performing. I was keen to know where the title of the album originated from, certainly not from the Mississippi Delta, that's for sure.

(Suzy): "The whole album now is about stories of real people. We were thinking about writing stories from different people's perspectives, I once had a conversation with my nephew when he was at University; I said there are two major things in life, be yourself, and be curious. That's the vibe of the whole album, we still want to know. We still want to learn about what is going on in the world right now. That is the concept of the album really.
" When I listened to the album, I had some curiosity, no pun intended because this was not a straight forward blues album by any stretch of the imagination. There were elements of blues, jazz, and reggae, all put into the melting pot. Different styles of differing genres, closely related but distant enough to make you sit up and concentrate on what was being portrayed by the lyrics and musical background. It made for interesting listening and laid the groundwork for parts of this chat.

(Simon): "Everything we write, we write between us, a lot of the time we collaborate, it's almost a Lennon and McCartney style of writing as regards John would write something and present it to Paul and vice-versa. Other times we write totally together. Also, we have a very eclectic taste in music, I've always been firmly rooted in the blues ever since I started to play the guitar, and we are very fortunate that we have our own studio where these ideas can take shape whenever and whatever time of day it is. That gives us a type of freedom we wouldn't normally get in a recording studio that belonged to someone else."

> *"I've always been firmly rooted in the blues"*

I get a feeling talking to the both of them, that this is a marriage of musical ideas as much as it is a marriage of two people. Taking time to write collectively, and also to bring to the table their own ideas fitting together explains the concept of the album and the reason behind the title. There are certain political statements and feelings within some of the songs, not so much in a protesting way, more of a political observation about what is going on in the world today, and what certain leaders are inflicting upon the world. So, not foot-stamping and ridicule, more of a measured response and a lean towards not believing everything you see and hear.

(Simon): " We'd been moving around a lot before we started to write the album, from The Isle Of Man into Germany and we'd sort of got around 75% of a song down, and then Suzy laid down some harmonies in Valencia. Then obviously because of all of the covid restrictions, we couldn't get together with everyone else because we were split all over the place."
As the conversation wore on it becomes increasingly obvious that musically we have a lot in common, especially myself and Simon. The chat swings from recording techniques to studios and then we hit upon the Led Zeppelin connection that we had in our musical background.

Parts of The Language Of Curiosity were recorded at Rockfield Studios in Monmouth where Robert Plant recorded his first two solo albums, as well as it being the studio where Bohemian Rhapsody was recorded.

(Simon): "I was away at boarding school which is where I started playing guitar, it was the environment that I was in I think that helped to trigger that. Hanging around with slightly older guys, I discovered Wishbone Ash, Black Sabbath, Pink Floyd, and of course, Led Zeppelin. It was only years later, a producer I was working with said to me, I love your blues playing, I said, I'm not a blues player, but he said, well you are. Subconsciously, I'd picked up the blues influences of the people that I'd been listening to," he explains.

(Suzy): "I just love songs, If I'm listening to a song, I love a good melody. I can remember when I was about three years old sitting on a swing listening to the soundtrack of Paint Your Wagon with Lee Marvin. We used to have a vinyl session with my mum when she

SIMON CAMPBELL

Guitar | Vocals | Mandolin | Synthesisers

Simon is a guitar player, vocalist, songwriter and record producer. Having played in a number of original bands, he was signed to Polydor Records in the early 90's and released an album with his band 'Little Brother'. After the band split he went on to form The Disciples and released an album in 1994.

In 2011 Simon was nominated in the Best Vocalist category in the British Blues Awards following the release of his debut solo album ThirtySix. 2014 saw him release his second solo album, The Knife which reflected Simon's increasing love of acoustic music from both sides of the Atlantic.

SUZY STARLITE

Bass | Vocals | Guitar
Keyboards | MOOG Minitaur

Suzy is a fine vocalist and songwriter plus plays fiendishly groovy bass and keyboards. Studying Media & Performance at Salford University she soon joined folk rockers Megiddo, who released an EP in 1994 followed by an album in 1996 and toured extensively on the UK folk circuit.

In 2012, she formed the band 'Starlite' and drafted in Simon on guitar. That year they gigged heavily featuring all original material penned by Suzy, including Mannifest, a three day festival on the Isle of Man.

was cooking Sunday lunch, we'd be listening to all sorts of stuff, seven-inch singles, and LPs, and especially, Paint Your Wagon. The neighbours used to giggle listening to me trying to sing like Lee Marvin. I played the French Horn at school and percussion and I was also in the school choir which I absolutely adored which led me into wanting to write stories. Melodically, I used to listen to Karen Carpenter a lot and sing along with her lyrics. Later, I discovered soft rock, Boston, and Journey, and then sort of fell into Led Zeppelin, for me it was a kind of journey which didn't materialize until I was in my thirties as opposed to people who found this stuff at 16-17. My first live gig was Stevie Wonder in Birmingham, which really set the bar for me."

Suzy and Simon have differing musical backgrounds, but wherever their muse takes them, it brought them together and set them on the path to what they are doing now. Writing, performing, and looking for new avenues to explore, while still retaining a blues influence. What impresses me as much as anything is how there doesn't seem any pressure on either of them to always come up with the next riff, or the next melody. I suppose when you live in your recording studio, you can wander in and out whenever the mood takes you without the expense or worry about time constraints.

This is evident in the album, smooth storytelling against a background of fine melodies, blues, folk, and country vibes.

(Suzy): "Later on, I'd developed my songwriting and also got into the groove side of things, picking up a bass guitar, learning that, and then for someone to say to me, you're a good bass player –'No I'm not,' I replied; and he said, 'well yes you are.' Hence, here I am. So, I started to listen to the top bass players, Andy Fraser from Free, John Paul Jones from Led Zeppelin, and Carl Radle, who played so well with Eric Clapton. So, I'm thinking, what shall I learn to play? Oh, I know, The Lemon Song by Zeppelin (lol). It took me about six months learning to play it by ear, I learned so much about what the bass can do, just by listening to and learning The Lemon Song. We got invited, Simon and I to play at this big gig in Valencia in front of 1,00 people and we played The Lemon Song for the very first time, me on bass and Simon singing lead vocals. We got a

fabulous reception, and that convinced me that the bass guitar was for me. Went from trepidation to thinking, wow that was great."

Maybe it's the relaxed setting of Portugal that brings out the best in Starlite-Campbell, be it recording or writing, honing tunes to take on the road. We had met a couple of times before this interview at Butlins Rock and Blues Festival at Skegness. The first time was three years ago, and then we met at the Blues Matters Stage, Hotshots, this year after they had played a storming set on the main stage. It's easy to chat with people who love music as much as they do, an almost kindred spirit coming from similar musical backgrounds and influences. This is reflected in the album, serious stories with serious lyrics about serious topics, but with a sense of freedom with the approach. This is a breath of fresh air for the music industry.

Away from chatting about music, I had come across a rather unknown fact regarding Suzy Campbell - her love of motorcycles and racing motorcycles, and competing at the Isle Of Man TT Races back in the day: "I'd just passed my test, and I got offered the chance to ride at The TT Races, the most I'd ever ridden was a 350 cc which I dropped in a field at one point, I only wanted to ride what I could pick up. So they pulled this bike out of the trailer, a proper sprint bike where you are leaning forward right over the handlebars, it was a 650 cc Ducati. The first ride was pretty terrible, weaving all over the place, 48mph, but I stayed on that bike all day long eventually getting the hang of it. On the 12th run at the end of the day, I won the race, fastest woman, and fastest in my class. Then I had another race in Germany where I crossed the line at 112 mph and ended up winning because the guy who thought he'd won had gone on a red light, so that was another triumph. I retired thereafter, but it was a great experience," she recalls with a proud laugh.

This had been such a friendly chat with two people who just want to make great music. Blues, country, folk, and rock all combine to portray exactly what Starlite-Campbell band is all about. There are plans for a couple of more studio albums and also a live album in the mix, so plenty of material to look forward to.

starlite-campbell.com

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

by Colin Campbell Images: Laura Carbone

One of the most influential exponents of Baton Rouge swamp blues, Kenny Neal is a second-generation southern Louisiana bluesman who is mindful of the region's overriding blues tradition and is ever-evolving with this genre that incorporates Zydeco and swamp blues.

Kenny was born on October 14, 1957, in New Orleans. His dad, harmonica player Raful Neal, was a Baton Rouge blues stalwart mixing company with Buddy Guy and Slim Harpo. At age 13, he was playing in his father's band, and at 17, he landed a job playing the bass guitar with Buddy Guy before putting together his own band. After many successful years of songwriting, playing guitar and harmonica, Kenny returns with a new release, Straight From The Heart on Ruf Records. Caught up with Kenny at his home in Baton Rouge for Blues Matters.

"Weather in Baton Rouge lovely but as for everything else…My last two years I've been renovating a house I bought to keep us busy. I finished it in a year and then started on my old 48 Buick in the garage and getting that ready. I also have fifteen acres of land that I'm turning into a venue for my blues festival, it's going to be cool. Yes, still got my mules as well. It's been busy, am also looking after my mom, got to take care of her now!"

From this we can safely say touring has not been a priority during these uncertain times. "I've got my new CD finished called Straight From The Heart. I'm really pleased with it. It turned out the way I planned. I wanted to touch on the 50s music of Louisiana, the way my dad Raful and Fats Domino, Ernie K-Doe and Guitar Slim played. With the horns on the record, I had these guys in mind. I went to Lafayette and got some guys from the buckwheat Zydeco boys for two cuts. It was a nice reunion to have them around, it didn't feel like working at all!"

Kenny now has his own record studio and record label Booga Music. "We're going to put local artists on this label. Gospel groups and older blues guys who were around when I was a kid. I have plans to take them into the studio and capture that moment, Henry Gray, Leon Blue, and Harvey Knox Band. We are opening a Juke Joint downtown in Baton Rouge. It'll be cool to have this downtown. We grew up with Juke Joints, dad had one when I was a kid. I had two or three later. We did it for the love of music and it was somewhere Musicians could share their music and get a chance to play."

Referencing the new album, there is a great horn section, this he arranged himself, he used to play the trumpet and it was the only time he read music. "I don't know how to read the music I do on the guitar and harmonica nowadays. The only theory training was when I was in Elementary with the trumpet. I have all these melodies in my head and Brandon Adams, my friend, he was born with one hand, he can play the keyboard better than people with two hands! I hummed the horn lines to him, and he plays it on the keyboards, and we send it to the horn players. I have a talented team. My family are onboard Darnell and Fredrick Neal. Because I have my Studio, I could bring in people who I wanted, I didn't have the clock running on me, you know. That was a good feeling! Then I met Boo Mitchell in Memphis and did the mixing at Willie Mitchell Studio."

Early in his musical career, he had mostly collaborated with his father but later there came an opportunity to work with Buddy Guy. "He was my dad's guitar player. They had a gig opening for Muddy Waters and Little Walter. That's when Muddy discovered Buddy and my dad! He offered them to come to Chicago, but my dad had just started a family and stayed behind. As years went by, Buddy would visit my home and he knew I was playing music, so when I turned nineteen, he needed a bass player and called my dad. They made a deal; I went to Chicago at nineteen playing bass with Buddy Guy and Junior Wells! I must have been doing something right, it was amazing looking back. I've a video from 1976 at home, Memphis Slim on keyboards, Professor Longhair on the other side of the stage, Buddy Guy on guitar, Junior Wells on harmonica, Phil Guy on guitar and Roosevelt Shaw was the drummer and I am singing!"

"Treat people, the way you want to be treated and respect people. My Grandmother told me; everybody is somebody regardless." This is the advice he always holds onto. Put it to Kenny reflecting on when he was a teenager what advice he would give himself; "It's okay to be so talented but please take your time to learn the business. That is 50% of what's going to make your career successful. Don't get the ego, learn how to copyright your songs and publish them." "It's easy today to get exposure but harder to get jobs. When I was coming up, the record companies could pick and choose. When I was with Alligator Records, the world knew I was a new artist and the only new one on that label. Now there are thousands of artists but it's harder, where do they start even though they are on social media. I am in a better position than the newcomers. I do like Christone Kingfish Ingram it's natural to him, he's got the soul, that's real and he understands the Mississippi tradition."

We chatted about song writing as well, Kenny tells me his lyrics come from the melody. "I can put a whole album together then listen to the music and go, this sounds like Change My Way Of Living and then start writing from there. I'm the type who says it's time to make a record let's put the music together, I go into creative mode for six or seven months and have fun doing it. I do not prepare it on paper as such, mentally it's circling around somewhere. My style of music would be a mixture between New Orleans, Ragtime, jazz with Delta from Mississippi in the North and West is Lafayette Cajun, Creole Zydeco music. It's like a gumbo so if you can figure out what that is, that's what it's going to be!"

He always tries to keep a cheerful outlook; "I'll see the worst thing and make the prettiest thing out of it. People say put that crap away, I say see what I can do with it. That's what keeps life interesting, I like the challenge. I've been through it all. I buried three of my family members in eleven months, my brother then two months later my dad died and then a guy murdered my baby sister. I had to go off the road for two years through physical health problems. I can still come out of it smiling, sharing music, and understanding my fans and where they come from. When they see me playing, they see I'm normal as well! You've got to knock the dust off and keep moving. I'm the eldest of ten children I try and keep the legacy of the family going."

We finished off with discussing the future; "We're hoping the pandemic clears up and start touring, if this happens, I can continue to work on the BB King Experience Tour that I'm in charge of. I'd like to take special guests with me on the road like, Larry McCray, that's what I plan to do."

For more information see Kenny's website:

kennyneal.net

TRACK TALK

KENNY HAS SOME AMAZING SPECIAL GUESTS INCLUDING TITO JACKSON PLAYING ON THE TUNE TWO-TIMING WITH KENNY AND SYREETA NEAL

SOMEONE SOMEWHERE:
"One of my dad's favourite tunes by Little Junior Parker. When I hear that song, it flashes me back to being a little kid listening to my dad performing. I wanted to capture that song and dedicate it to my dad and Little Junior Parker. I also used my dad's keyboard player; he plays in church. He played the piano work, Darrell Jefferson. The real deal, straight from the church house!"

BLUES KEEP CHASING ME:
"This is dedicated to my friend Lucky Peterson. He played on every album I recorded. Throughout his life, he always felt the blues was chasing him. He had the blues all the time. I was one of the brothers that stuck with him, we were dear friends. Got hundreds of stories about him! "Here's one... we were in Houston Texas, and we were walking around this Club with our wireless guitar, and we walked outside. People were following us. When we got out, this Policeman was putting a parking ticket on Lucky's van! Lucky forgot all about the concert he's shouting Officer that's my van, I'm playing tonight. The Officer said so play me something and Lucky played for him!"

BON TON ROULET:
"Let The Good Times Roll. We're talking about the people having a good time on the Bayou. Every weekend they go to the bayou, take their music and play washboards in Louisiana on the bayou. Dwayne Dopsie is on the album with his band. They are a big family like the Neals it was good to reunite with them!"

IT DON'T COST NOTHING:
"That came straight from the heart. It doesn't cost nothing to share a little love. A little respect, and we can all rise above. In these days we need to show love, it doesn't cost nothing. That's the way I was raised.

I GOT TO TELL SOMEBODY:
I don't know who that somebody is. You just want to get things off your chest and tell somebody she's been doing me real bad!

I'LL PLAY THE BLUES FOR YOU:
"Albert King made a big statement in my life. I combined a song I wrote called Any Fool Will Do. I took the rhythm from that and combined I'll Play The Blues For You. It's two songs in one. I wanted to pay respect to Albert King, I like the arrangement!"

IT'S BEEN SO LONG:
"That's my dad's song from the 60s. Every record I do I put at least one of his songs on it. This keeps him alive and in my heart. He did some great songs. I did this one because I was in the studio when I was a kid when he recorded it."

LOUISE ANA:
"That's New Orleans, the way we roll down on Bourbon Street and the way I grew up! Having a good time."

NEW ORLEANS:
"Had already been offered by Governor Office to use this song as a Louisiana tourist song. Wrote this last year."

VANEESE THOMAS

by **Iain Patience** Image right: **Jamie Kilgore**

With a new album about to launch in April, US singer-songwriter Vaneese Thomas is clearly on a roll and delighted with the finished product., when we catch up by Zoom at her place near New York to chat about the album, her remarkable career and her truly legendary, historic music background.

"I'm so excited, very excited," she says with a wide smile, before adding, "I'm very proud of it. I think perhaps it's the best thing I've ever done." And listening to the driving rhythm, wonderful arrangements and powerfully, socially aware lyricism, it's hard to disagree. For the latest release, 'Fight the Good Fight,' is an absolute tour de force, a release that really should propel her to the absolute forefront of modern Americana-cum soul-blues music.

Thomas is easy-going, warm and relaxed, looking forward to hitting her old hometown, Memphis, in May for the Blues Foundation Awards ceremony where she's already a nominee for…"…around the eighth time, maybe! Fingers crossed this time," she beams with evident pleasure and hope.

STILL FIGHTING

Before going much further, I ask how it feels to be pretty much part of an amazing musical family, one that's truly little short of 'soul royalty': "Well you know I never really wanted to become a musician. I guess I'd seen it all too close and too early, maybe. I was raised in Memphis and I'd be in studios with my father. So, I also knew a lot about how the business, the labels worked. I studied at college, went to Grenoble University in France and never thought I'd become a musician."

This surprising thought leads us to look back on the career of her late father, the legendary Rufus Thomas, a soul-blues giant probably most known for his huge blues hit, 'Walkin' the Dog.': "You know my father was a blues singer back in the 1930s, when there were jazz bands everywhere. He was a Vaudevilian entertainer. He could dance, he was a comic, he worked hard throughout his career. But he was always a singer. I go to Poretta Festival in Italy, I love the place, the people and I was there with him when he cut the ribbon for the Rufus Thomas Park at the festival site," she explains.

And so I suggest, with her unusual background, was she always meant to be a singer?: "Maybe, but no I don't think so. It really came about in 70s when I met up with a great friend, Carolyn Mitchell. We performed as a duo, Vaneese & Carolyn, and started writing together too. We wound up with a record deal and it just went forward from there really. We're still great friends." And the rest, as they say, is history.

Moving from college in Philladelphia, PA, she made the move to live and work in New York. The move was to prove a pivotal moment in her growing musical career and development: "New York was a revelation in many ways. I met my husband there for one thing," she laughs, describing Wayne Warnecke who shares co-production credits on the new album. Warnecke was already heavily involved in the business when they first met, with an interest in writing and playng drums and a bit of piano. "Wayne and I actually met in the studio, when he and his buddy, Ernie Poccia, found themselves in need of a lyricist. Ernie first made contact and asked me to come over and help out. He was working with Wayne and that's how we met up. And we're still together," she again laughs.

This in turn led to increasing amounts of regular work as writers and producers in the area. And while Thomas reflects on its success at the time it should be noted she was already a well-established figure in the Eastern seaboard/New York area entertainment world. Her voice-overs on jingles and the like were always in demand giving her what she describes as: "…a really good career, a lucrative career, without having to go out on the road."

Indeed, Thomas has never felt the need to hit the road over the years, but her stunning vocals have supported the efforts of countless greats including Eric Clapton, the late Joe Cocker, Stevie Wonder and Michael Jackson. A few years ago, in 2013, she released the highly acclaimed 'Blues For My Father', an album that included a delightfully engineered vocal mix with her her sister, Carla Thomas, one of the greatest soul singers ever.

In 1987, signed to Geffin records, then one of the biggest labels globally, she delivered her debut, eponymous solo album, a release that included the soul-drenched ballad 'Let's Talk It Over.' That one song roared into the charts, creating immense industry interest and pretty much cementing her position in the music world. From there, Thomas followed up later that year with '(I Wanna Get) Close To You,' again on Geffen Records and only just missing hitting the same charts target where it snagged number 12 in the R&B Charts. And then, surprisingly, Thomas says her career sort of stalled, leaving her busy and in demand as a jingle voice which kept her both busy and financially secure.

"They always welcome me like royalty

Of course, most would be more than content with such a background and career, but Thomas then hit paydirt again on the blossoming song-writing front when her song, 'One Shining Moment', recorded by no less a figure than Diana Ross, made the UK top ten charts in 1992. Even now, Thomas smiles with clear pleasure at the memory of that one as we talk.

The latest album, "Fight the Good Fight,' as its title suggests, is something of a hard-hitting offering, with songs that reflect Thomas' concerns with the world in general, politics and racial issues. This is music that takes it all on, head-on. She explains that her late mother, Lorene, was always an activist, so that has not only rubbed off on her but is a central part of her entire personal life and core beliefs:

"My mother was always active. When I was growing up, she'd take me out with her to rallies, to picket-lines, to march, to fight for peoples' rights. It was an essential part of who she was, what she was. It all seemed so natural back then, part of me too. It's still something I think to be incredibly important even now," she beams and adds the rider, "maybe even more so now," a barely disguised reference to the recent racial tensions in the USA under the Trump presidency.

This in turn leads us to her recent involvement with black African-American music and the 'Black Opry,' clearly named after the Nashville Country/Americana musical

Carla and Vaneese with their first car_1955 Chevy

Carla at the piano on which she wrote Gee Whiz at age 15 and Vaneese

Marvell and Vaneese

Touring with Geffen record_Aunt Dot (sister of Rufus) on Van's right

Vaneese & Aretha Franklin

Vaneese with Dan Aykroyd

Vaneese with Billy Joel

Vaneese with Sting

centre albeit with a clever twist and play on words: "That's something I want to be more involved with. It will help open doors for African-American musicians everywhere here and that's important to me," she confirms.

We touch on her near unique family experiences with her father Rufus a hugely important figure in the world of Memphis/Stax soul music; her sister Carla - aka the Queen of Soul; and her brother Marvel, also a leading musician. "I's just how it was, how it is," she smiles. "I saw all parts of the business growing up. My mom wanted me to be a lawyer but that never happened."

I mention Atlanta soul musician, William Bell, once telling me he considered the Thomas crew to be 'family,' and again she smiles, nods her head and agrees: "William's just so lovely. We're truly like family. He's always been part of us and was a great friend of my father's."

And what about working with, singing with the late Italian Opera giant, Luciano Pavarotti, I ask: " I knew Pavarotti. Each year he ran a big charity event in his hometown of Modena. I was often there as a singer. I love Italy and it seems almost like a second home to me these days. My dad was involved in setting up the Soul Music festival in Poretta. There's even a park, the Rufus Thomas Park, there, named after him. It's such an honour. I love it there. They always welcome me like royalty because of that."

As we come to the end of our chat, I sneak in a final, somewhat cheeky question and ask where she gets the striking blonde hairstyle from. Again, Thomas, grins widely, fingers her hair and nods: "I don't really know. I tried it for a while then went back to natural. Missed it, so returned, went back to blonde. And that's how it's stayed really. It's become like my trademark!"

vaneesethomas.com

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KENNY NEAL - STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART
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PROPER MUSIC DISTRIBUTION

I got the chance to talk to Miami based singer, songwriter, and astounding blues rock guitarist Albert Castiglia. We talked about different subjects including the new album I Got Love, his relationship with Mike Zito and working with Junior Wells. Read on….

by **Colin Campbell** Images: **Laura Carbone**

Albert kicks-off explaining how and why he's currently working with his blues brother Mike Zito at the moment:

"I've wanted to do this for years. When I signed with Mike's label (Gulf Coast Records) we had the opportunity to do a lot of shows then Covid happened! I got it early 2021 it took me six months to kick, it was hard. I was kind of depressed, Mike said I've got this trip I want to do. He had released his Chuck Berry Tribute record that I played on. He asked me to do a few dates in the Mid-West with Joanna Connor and it made me feel better getting out there playing. These went well and we went on to do the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Cruise last November. People were taking notice of the chemistry Mike and I had. Mike came to me in the Fall with the idea of going on tour and calling it the Blood Brothers. We are like Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin. He's Frank being pro-active and the mastermind behind the party. I'm Dean, sitting in the hot tub waiting for him to call me when it's time to go! He talked to the Agency before me about it. We're like brothers, I was in! Looking forward to bringing this show to England and Scotland, it'll be wild! I played with Mike in Scotland at Lockerbie Jazz Festival (Last time this interviewer had seen him play). You Scots are crazy dudes, insane!"

Post pandemic, I'm curious to know how it feels hitting the stage again:

"Feels great but it's taken some getting used to. The long touring is what I'm trying to get used to, just been away for a month. I missed my family but getting the hang of it now. Next, we'll be in the South then to Europe. It's fight or flight I have to do it, this is what I do!"
Do you think you get the balance right between being a touring musician and having a family, I ask. Albert is quick to reply:
"Yes, only because I locked out with the right family. It takes an understanding person to be a spouse in this arrangement. My bass player Justine just left the band to start a family. I was lucky, my wife had a career of her own when I met her. This was after a string of heartbreak with other women. They liked what I was doing at the beginning then after a few months they want you to stop and become an Insurance salesman. Four years ago, my daughter found me; I found out I had a daughter and grandchildren! My wife wanted kids when we first met but I felt I wouldn't be a good parent. When I first met my daughter, she looked like my grandmother it was as if she was a present handed to me by her. They turned out to be cool. My daughter sits in with me, she's a singer. When I get lonely, they cheer me up."

We turn to discuss the tracks on his latest release: there's a theme of love through this but there's also songs of defiance towards negativity. Albums are diaries and journals of what you've been through in previous years you were creating this music.

"The songs got to mean something. All the songs are to do with what I've been through in the past two years. During lockdown I had a lot of time on Social Media, unfortunately. When you're on so long you meet a lot of negativities. Some songs are about being less judgmental of one another. We have to embrace what we have in common. Burning Bridges was to do with factions in the blues community that are purist in their views.

There are also contemporary factions. They took the time to fight with each other, a lot of my friends got hurt. It also stemmed from being cautious during the pandemic. I had some money saved so wasn't in a hurry to get back out playing. When the money ran out and I had no choice, I incurred the wrath of people who really believed like I do. So, the song was a love song to the Social Media trolls and people who get behind keyboards and get too judgmental, they'd be less inclined to do this if they were in front of your face! Take My Name Out Your Face was a phrase someone used on Social Media, I had to use this as a title, it just wrote itself that song. Since I Got Love: During lockdown it helped we had a good support system. The song is about love conquering all. You might not have any money but if you've got love that will carry you through until things get better. It was the glue that got us through the past two years. Long Haul Daddy relates to symptoms I had after my quarantine. Usually when I write, I write through extremes of happiness and sadness. I was sick that day. I had the guitar tuned to D. I started playing the shuffle and sang the lyrics and it just worked!"

Maybe you have a song-writing technique to employ, I suggest?:

"Yes, I write according to how I feel. Eric Clapton started me off on this. I bought Derek and The Dominoes Layla album and played it nonstop. To me this was the greatest rock and roll album about unrequited love there ever was. You can hear the pain these guys were in. Either lovesick or dope sick. It came out in their music. That's how I wrote even as a kid I had to be miserable or happy for the music to come out, that hasn't changed. I read that Gene Simmons from Kiss said you have to apply yourself writing for two hours a day. I have to live life and look back, reflect then write. Whatever I write down it has to mean something. It's got to be my blues! I'd be disingenuous writing about the black experience I can't write about being in the fields, I have to write about my life. You should live your story not anybody else's."

Always interested to know the background, I ask Albert to look back, growing up what music did you enjoy listening to?

"I listened to a lot of classic rock. My dad loved the Rolling Stones. Their wedding song was I Can't Get No Satisfaction, that's what they told me! I loved both them and the Beatles. Then Led Zeppelin. Eric Clapton was my guitar hero growing up and how I got into the blues. He had an album Just One Night half the material was blues! I also liked AC/DC and the Allman Brothers. Coming from Florida you listened to them and Lynyrd Skynyrd. Then mid 80s I bought a Muddy Waters album; I was about fifteen years old and that was when I realized I wanted to play blues for a living."

So why guitar rather than any other instrument, I wonder:

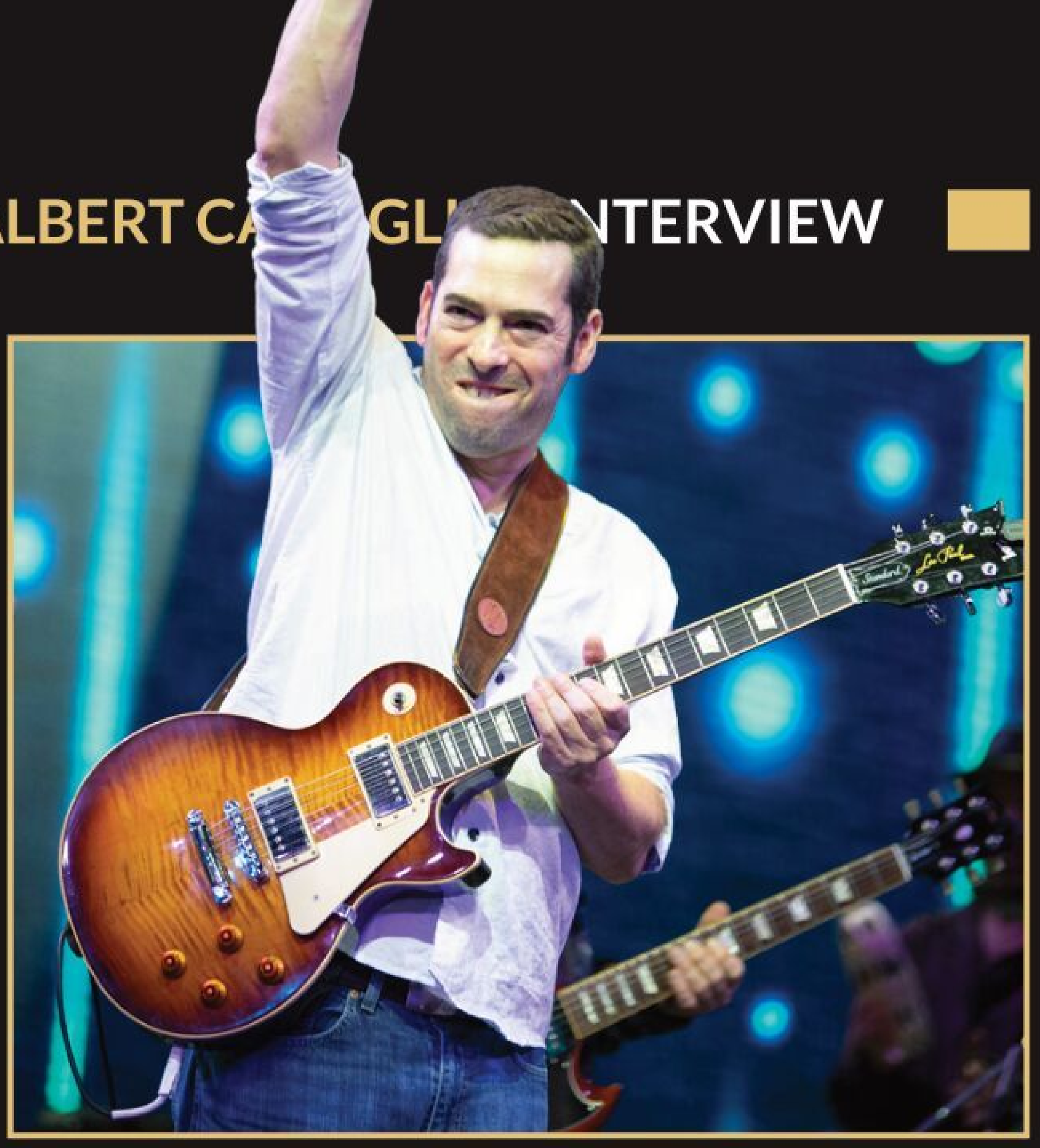
"My Uncle had a Yamaha acoustic guitar and drums he would jam with a friend at home. My Uncle taught me three chords, I bought a guitar and it's never stopped from then. When I graduated from High School, I went to jam sessions from '87 to '90. First band was the Miami Blues Authority. We did a lot of Jimmy Reed, Muddy Waters and Southern Rock, Wet Willy, and Allman Brothers. It was a great band. This educated me and prepped me for playing in Junior Wells Band."

The route to Junior's band was a relatively easy path:

"We had a mutual friend called Gloria Peters. She hung out with him in the '70s and lived in Florida. She said he was playing in Florida on New Year day, 1996. She introduced me to him, I was freaking out!. Buddy Guy was my favourite all time blues guitarist. Junior was super cool and then his road-manager came to me saying he heard I played guitar. He asked me to sit in with Junior. He said 'you had better be good because if you're not he's going to embarrass you in front of all these people.' At the time I was working as a Welfare Officer, and I said to him a bad night with Junior Wells beats a good day in the office.

> **I wanted to play with him until the end**

They brought me on stage for the second set. I jammed with the band first then I did three songs with Junior. I thought that was the best day of my life at that time. A month later I went to Buffalo and Detroit with them then went back to work. Early '97 I was asked to play with them in Chicago full time. I had to be there in three days, I dropped everything jumped on a plane and that was the day I left Miami for Chicago. I have not looked back since! He never sat me down and gave advice. One night at the Blues Cruise in '97 on the SS Norway with Bo Diddley, Irma Thomas and Eddy Clearwater, Ronnie Earl on the bill. During this Junior and I were at the bar, and he was talking to me about his childhood playing with Earl Hooker they grew up in Chicago and play on trolley cars and trains, doing shows for Sharecroppers. Then he turned serious and asked me what I planned on doing with this life. At the time I only wanted to be a Chicago musician. I wanted to play with him until the end. He didn't expect me to play in the band forever, so he said 'This is what you're going to do; Keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut.



You're going to learn from everyone around you in this band including me.' This was a big thing for him to do because it was a large band. When you're in a band there's going to be factions and people who butt heads with you. 'Some day you'll have your own band, and it will be up to you and people like you to keep the blues alive.' That was the day that my responsibility of keeping the blues alive hit me. This is about keeping the music alive. There are people who don't want me to do this, people who feel I don't deserve to do this by nature of my background. The purists are extreme and have the loudest voices. But when Junior Wells handed me that advice, that superseded anyone else's opinion about anything. I learned a lot about running a band and connecting with an audience through him. It's a shared experience, he taught me how important that is."

We mull over the Florida blues scene:

"It's a good scene, we need more bass players and drummers though! There are certain parts in the state that thrive. Fort Lauderdale especially, and Tampa. Great artists around like Damon Fowler, Selwyn Birchwood. Under-appreciated scene. The main and only place I play in the area regularly is the Funky Biscuit, one of the best venues in the country, you need to get out there!"

Closing, I ask about future projects?

"There will be an album produced by Joe Bonamassa with myself, Mike Zito, Josh Smith, and others. Going into Darkside Studios in Louisiana, it's my favourite place to record. The mixing desk is amazing, sure Joe will love it. Going to have to block out the fact I'll be recording with two of the best guitarists in the world," he laughs.

www.albertcastiglia.net

NEAL BLACK
THE REAL DEAL FOR 30 YEARS

Neal Black is one of the most authentic bluesmen I know, his blues come from a deep, dark but honest place that exists in all of our psyches. His lyrics paint pictures of broken relationships, hope, despair and disappointment.

by **Steve Yourglivch** Images: **Philip Ducap**

They are delivered via a lived-in voice of experience accompanied by a guitar that sounds as if it too has travelled through a world of regret. In effect, Neal Black is the real deal and has been consistently for the last 30 years. He has spent most of that time signed to Dixie Frog Records, probably the best blues label outside of the USA. During that time he's released nine album with his classy band The Healers, plus wonderful collaborations with Larry Garner, Fred Chepellier and Nico Wayne Toussant as well as various production and writing credits.

All of this makes me wonder why Neal hasn't ever made a big breakthrough here in the UK. This month Dixie Frog are recognising Neal's contribution by releasing Wherever The Road Takes Me on double CD and vinyl. It pulls together a best of selection from across Neal's career including tracks from some of the early, now hard to find releases plus eight live recordings never before released from around 2005. Maybe this will widen the UK audience and lead to some shows over here, as Neal tells me, 'This album has had the best UK pre-sales orders we've ever had so I'm keen to build on that.' UK promoters take note.

So first off, a quick history lesson. Neal was actually born in Washington in 1959 but grew up mainly in Fayetteville, North Carolina. His father was in the military and the family had a house in Texas they moved back and forth to depending on where he was stationed. Around 1979 in San Antonio Neals career began to blossom and the first version of The Healers appeared. He recalls fondly, 'The early to mid-eighties in Texas was a great time to be a musician. Unlike today it was easy to get shows and earn decent money. It was the time of the Texas Blues Explosion with great artists like The Fabulous Thunderbirds, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Johnny Copeland and Omar and the Howlers bursting on the scene. We supported and toured with all of those guys. There were many other great bands that never made it as far as recording albums but were terrific just playing in the clubs and such. You could see Billy Gibbons checking out young bands in bars or go see Albert Collins jamming with Jimmie Vaughan. Magical times.'

Others that Neal opened for include Albert King, Leon Russell, George Thorogood and Paul Butterfield. He tried hard to learn something from all of them. Even as a young muso he wanted to expand his knowledge and enrolled into The Southwest Guitar Conservatory studying under great jazz players Barney Kessel, Herb Ellis and Jacky King. Neal observes, ' I've never made a full out blues record, the blues is a major part of everything for sure but there's always all these other influences going on.'

Having attracted interest from the Robert Cray management team, Neal moved to New York and soon established himself as part

of the city's burgeoning underground blues movement. As well as performing with The Healers you could find Neal jamming with the lokes of Popa Chubby, Joan Osborne, Blues Traveller, Spin Doctors or The Holmes Brothers. In this period the debut self-titled album and follow up Blues Power were released, each receiving critical acclaim in Rolling Stone magazine. Neal found himself in great demand and toured with Jimmy Johnson as his band leader including the only ever UK dates, he occupied a similar role for Chicago great Jimmy Dawkins.

The next leg of Neal's journey took him to Mexico. Why Mexico? 'Well I went to play a couple of shows and one of the booking agents suggested we did The Hard Rock Café touring circuit. It was a lot of fun, we played in Acapulco, Guadalajara and loads of other great places. It was interesting to me because the amount of appreciation we got was really high and I couldn't understand why more American blues artists weren't going there.' In fact Neal stayed in Mexico for three years. He became Professor of Music at the University Pan Americano in Guadalajara teaching appreciation of American music, a time he remembers fondly. He also got to play with Mexican superstar Jose Fors and his band Forseps. Cuban born Jose is a huge star in Mexico, as well as a rock star he is a world renowned painter. Neal recalls, 'We used to sometimes perform at these huge arenas where they held bullfights in the afternoon and we would play this heavy rock music at night. It was quite a culture shock from what I was used to.'

The release of third album Dreams Are For Losers was then released and whilst touring Europe to promote that, lead to the decision by Neal to move to France and put down roots, feeling that musicians are better respected here than back in the USA and having a nice life style. A number of critically acclaimed albums followed with Neal being nominated for several European awards too. Neal has seen changes at Dixie Frog throughout this time too. Original owner Phillippe Langlois built a label renowned for discovering unique blues artists and nurturing their talent, something Neal admired and was proud to be part of. New owner Andre Brodzki has come in and continued to evolve the label, maintaining its blues reputation while integrating more modern marketing ideas. In fact Neal knew Andre from way back in 1993 when he was the artist representative whilst endorsed by Gibson Guitars. The future looks bright.

This has lead to the Wherever The Road Takes Me Release. I wondered how hard it was selecting the best tracks from such a long and extensive back catalogue. Neal explains the process, 'Basically I put together a list and the guys at Dixie Frog had a list. Then we swapped lists and surprisingly they were very, very close to each others. It was naturally governed by the time available which was about 75 minutes on the CD which is not too bad but you've only got 22 minutes per side.' I told Neal how pleased I was to see a number of selections from his early releases which are now hard to find and also that there were at least a couple of tracks, Worried About It and Lost Without You that I didn't recognise at all.

'Those tracks might have been on some other Dixie Frog projects that I was on, like The Blues Conspiracy with me and Nico Wayne Toussant and Leadfoot Rivet. The live tracks come from maybe three or four different shows, a couple from France and I think one from Germany that got on there. I think it's really well packaged too. That was always something Dixie Frog aimed to do, put together a good product with a booklet and lots of information.'

The good news for fans is when I asked about an album of brand new material Neal revealed, 'I'm already working on that! That should be out about the middle of next year probably. Originally we were going to release that first but Dixie Frog wanted to do this Anniversary Special first because it has been very successful for other artists on the roster. It's certainly getting good interest from the public. We've got a big European tour going on too, we're on the road as much as possible. Of course, apart from the last two years. Each time they let us out of confinement we went out on the road. It's been strange, sometimes you got a full house, other times it was limited, one night everyone was wearing masks and another no masks at all.'

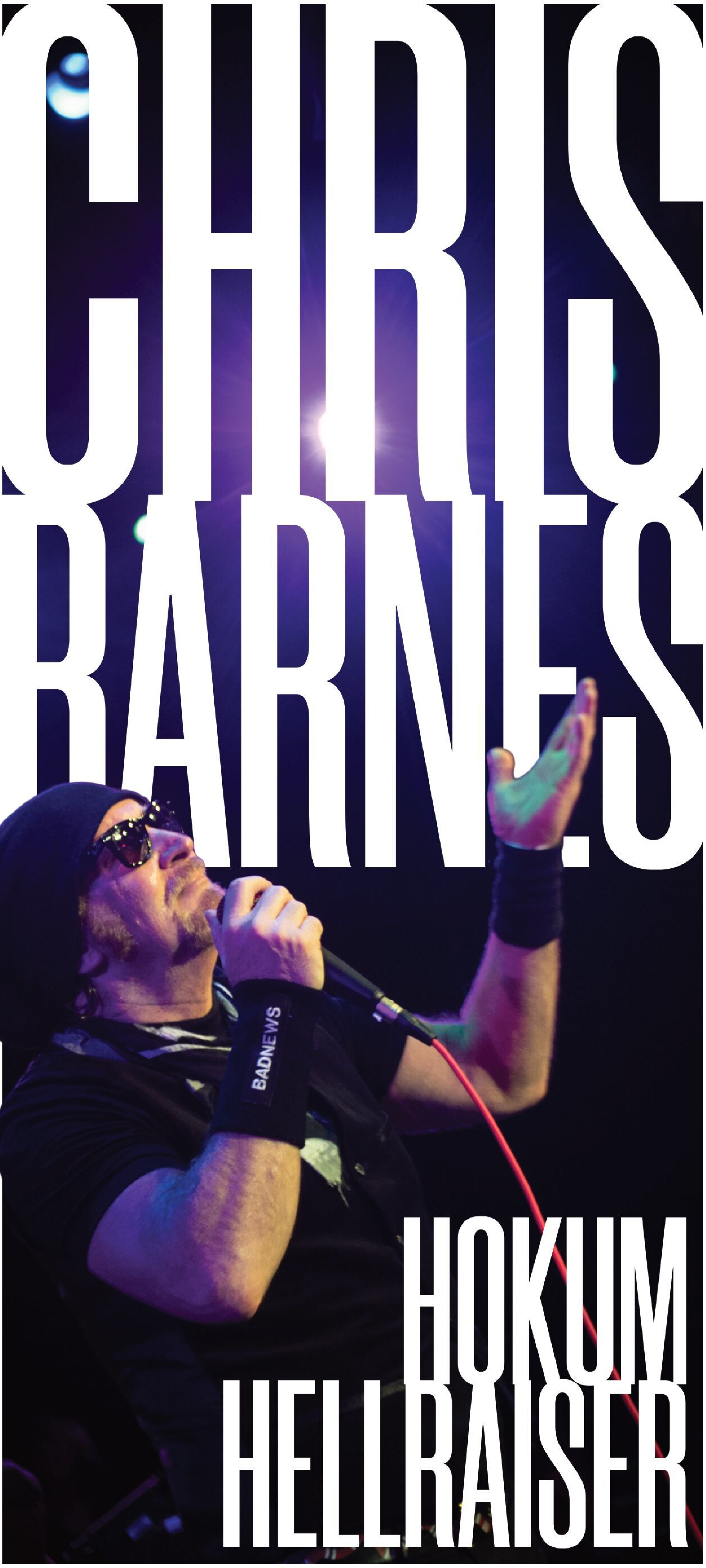
Neal could almost release another compilation of artists he's worked on projects with, he especially enjoyed recording an album with Larry Garner. 'You know when we collaborated together we had never met, I loved his music and you hope that when you do get to meet they are the same person you envisioned. Larry turned out to me the same in person as I had respected via his music. A nice guy, super humble and super talented. We hit it off, within five minutes we were best buddies. Meeting Fred Chapelier was similar, we met in a studio working on a project and I invited him to tour with me. We had no rehearsals, I gave him some MP3s on the plane to listen to.'

Wherever The Road Takes me is released on May 13th as a double Cd with the double Vinyl version following in June.

> **"*It was quite a culture shock from what I was used to...***

CHRIS BARNES

HOKUM HELLRAISER



New York bluesman Chris BadNews Barnes is a guy who knows the form, plays the field and after ten years in the saddle ripped through the gaps to deliver his own personal, pithy punch with a self-penned push and intention. His latest album, 'BadNews Rising' highlights a decade of pushing at the blues-bar, always aware that he was out on a limb at times but confident that the material he plays and loves was a winner.

by **Iain Patience** Images: **Laura Carbone**

Barnes justifiably takes pride in often being called the King of Hokum. Initially an all round US television personality, comedy scriptwriter and actor, he discovered the blues Hokum bls genre almost by chance, though maybe it was more a case of inevitability given his career background, a perfect fit in so many ways.

So, where does the 'Bad News' come from? An obvious question, I ask: "Well, people always think it comes from the actor Chris Barnes from the movie Bad News Bears. That's not me! When I was growing up there was a black baseball player, Marvin Bad News Barnes, he was always trouble, just trouble. He was always a problem, there's a great book written about him. My father's name was Marvin. So, growing up all my friends called me Bad News, cos he was a popular basketball player. It just stuck."

It also echoes Barnes' strongly held belief that bluesmen need a moniker: "I'm just a believer that every blues guy should have a handle. You know, Elwood, Jake, Big Eyes, Howlin' Wolf. You know that handle thing," he says with a serious laugh, before adding, "I moved to New York City in '77 to be a radio announcer, I went to radio school. It was in Times Square but I wanted to be a comedian. I was at 'Catch a Rising Star', learning the business. Loads of musicians would be hanging out and I'd open for the bands. I'd go on live and say to the audience 'give me a woman's first name and a household object.' They'd call out, say, Jenny, and a frying pan. I'd then do a 12-bar blues around it…"Her name was Jenny… da, da, da, da….' I'd just do it on the spot. Well, I was doing it at the club Tramps where I'd open for the bands, maybe Pinetop Perkins or Big Eyes Willie Smith. Koko Taylor. I'd do it while the band was maybe setting up behind me, so there was no dead air They'd start tapping along with what I was doing so I'd have a big-out. You know, 'And now welcome…. Pinetop Perkins or Big Eyes,' whoever, as I bowed out and they took over with their sets. I'd maybe say, 'And that's the reason, Jenny's in season,' followed by 'and now put your hands together for the queen of soul, Miss Koko Taylor.' "

So the love of Hokum comes from this time, I question, and ask who tipped you onto it firstly?: "Well, after the first set, I'd hang out with the band or whoever was on. And one night it was Big Eyes Willie Smith. He's the one that said to me, 'You know, what you're doing is called Hokum Blues. WC Handy

said, 'You hook 'em with the Hokum! They always had a comedic blues cat who opened for them. They kept the crowd there so they could do their sets. It was a very vibrant part of the blues culture. Handy was very supportive of the hokum acts."

With Hokum firmly on the agenda, centre-stage even, I suggest Barnes must like the late, legendary master of the double entendre, bluesman Bo Carter: "Absolutely, and did you know, Ma Rainey's band, Tampa Red and XXXXXXX, they were the Hokum Boys. Then there was also Big Bill Broonzy. I can sing hokum all night long and maybe nobody gets it but I throw in an Aerosmith song and as soon as I say that, they all go, 'Oh, okay! It's a good feed-in, kinda hits it."

Barnes explains where his love of music started: "Ironically, my father had a coffee shop in Pennsylvania. We all had to work at the coffee shop, you know, maybe wash dishes. Next door there was a music studio and I'd be banging on the big soup pans and my father said, 'Enough of that. Why don't you go take some classes?' So I started taking classes and met a kid there called Clarence Spady. And from that, honestly, we were twelve or fourteen years old and we started playing in night clubs. So I was always doing the music then when I went to New York I got right on-stage at 'Catch A Rising Star' then a gig at Tramps. I just always liked the music but I could never figure it out. Then the Blues Brothers happened! I thought, right, that's how you do it."

Then I went to the Second City, where John (Belushi) and Danny (Aykroyd) were both alumni. I thought, these comedians are doing absolutely nothing comedic in their actual performance of the blues, yet you get a sense of comedia from it, so that's what I do!. The reason is because when you go to Second City, you're at the Oxford of comedy. You're taught all the laws of comedy, when you do parody you must obey the laws of behaviour. So, if you have to do a blues act, you have to obey the laws of what a blues act would do on-stage. That's what they did, and Jake and Elwood, John and Danny came out as the Blues Brothers. There's nothing comedic about it but you get a sense of comedia from it," he explains the performance mix in depth. "That's what I do now. It's what I always try and do."

"Blues royalty. I worked where the house band could be Will Lee, Steve Jordan. I'm hanging around these guys, I'm seventeen years old and I have a photo of me with Bill Murrey down in Santa Monica. .He whispered in my ear, 'Here's the secret. Surround yourself with the best!' It's like the Blues Brothers again; if you don't want them to see through the card-trick the sonic has to be even better!"

With the latest album, BadNews Rising, a mostly self-penned release, Barnes confirms he struck it lucky with Nashville drummer and producer Tom Hambridge onboard for the project: "I love a drummer that drives from the rear. Tom does that.I felt that after about ten years doing this, I'd maybe earned the right to do my own material. I started with other people's stuff, and each album I got more recognition and respect. My Hkum, my 90 Proof Truth, the 'Live' album and now 'BadNews Rising.' I kinda reckon I've served my time. It's the right time to expose myself with my own writing and songs."

Considering his recording career to date, Barnes says: "I did the Hokum Blues album and it got really good reviews. The problem was when I started trying to get booked, people would say, 'What are you, a jug band or something? I'd say, 'No.' They'd say, 'Well, is it like jazz?'. Again, I'd say 'No!' Then I got on the Blues Cruise, so I thought I've gotta come out banging. I asked Tony Braunagel, who produced the "Live' album, can we record this? I'm gonna be with Steve Guyger and rehearsing with Gary Hoey's band, thePhantom Blues Band Horn Section. So Tony was great. We recorded like three shows. The best one of course, the recording gets cut, what you expect. But it got blues awards and nominations as best Live album and I'd never have got that without those cats. But it made me think, okay it's time to move on from doing the cover work, to get where I originally wanted to be. To work in stages then to get to my original work. You know that's what Bill Wax told me. He said, 'You know, before you do the originals you got to wake up everybody through the genre!' And if you Google blues genres, you see Texas, Chicago, Delta, all those, and Hokum. It's there. So I was told, 'you gotta re-establish the genre. But that's my wheel-house, that's my genre. You can't start with just contemporary hokum blues, you must start at the beginning then move onto your own patch. So that's what I've done. Now we've got it, it's good. I have a formula that works. I'm doing the Memphis IBA Blues Foundation thing next week and my shows are all different now cos there's very little of the cover songs, it's more my originals. That's what I set out to get to."

When I mention two tracks from the new album, 'Chicks Dig Me,' and 'I Like Cleavage,' we both laugh in agreement, this is pure Hokum blues, traditional based but with a tight contemporary style. Barnes is clearly proud of the album: "You know what I love bout it is when we do it, all twelve songs, every one of them lands. It all works. Now they get who I am, what I am and what my genre is. Maybe I see myself as the greatest opening festival act in the world. Sometimes you have to be crowd wrangler, a shape shifter."

www.chrisbarnesnyc.com

"I could never figure it out. Then the Blues Brothers happened!

WE WISH HER WELL

by **Steve Yourglivch** Images: **John Bull**

Emma Wilson has been attracting a lot of attention since releasing the Live And Acoustic EP in 2019. It led to her collaborating with the legendary Terry Reid and now she is releasing her first full length album Wish Her Well. It's been worth the wait as it's an album full of well written, beautifully delivered soulful blues. For Emma the journey here has been a long one, for many years she has been a much in demand backing singer, learning her craft and honing her talents along the way.

Emma is now enjoying the challenge of being the front person, the centre of attention. When I caught up with her to talk about this piece, she and her band had just played the album launch at London's iconic 100 Club. 'It was wonderful, I love the way the stage is positioned, not down one end of the building but along the side so you can really see and feel the audience around you. And of course, the décor, the walls are filled with pictures of all the legendary artists who have played there. I signed my name on the dressing room wall of course, it has to be done. The gig went well, the sound was terrific, We played the album in full which was great, and I'm looking forward to the songs evolving as live performances, you know I get caught up in the moment rather than singing them straight the same way every time.'

One of the most pleasing things about watching Emma progress over the last couple of years is the confidence is has gained to write her own material and deliver it to an audience. I was one of many who encouraged her to take that route after hearing the track Wish Her Well on the acoustic EP. Reflecting, Emma now says, ' It's wonderful doing my own material. Hearing the feedback from you and others about that track and how honestly I'd delivered it certainly gave me the confidence to write more. It really made me think...I can do this! Wish Her Well started off as a 12-bar blues, it has changed with the writing. Lyrically and melodically it's the most simple track on the album but people can relate to it. I loved performing that live cos it's my oldest song, my standard now.'

Wish Her Well might be the title track but all ten of these original songs hang together well as a complete piece of work, they complement each other which isn't always the case in these days of streaming and downloads. 'This is my first studio album, based simply around me and what I wanted things to be like. We recorded with everyone together in the room, the first day was just playing around with the tracks, learning them. So, everyone put in ideas and found what felt good, that worked really well. That way we created a creative bubble to work in. The first session was five days, the second four days. Half the album in each session. I switched my phone off and just focused on the project. It was almost like a meditation retreat. All the

songs are based on true experiences, so I was going through all of those emotions again, reliving it all. It's cathartic, it's exhausting and elating. Of the band I've known Mat (Hector, drummer) for three years, the others I met on the first day of recording but everyone was emotionally invested.'

You do feel that investment in the musicianship, I'm sure we've all heard albums in the past recorded by artists who have invested in big studios with top session guys who only play what's put in front of them, often leaving the end product feeling somewhat clinical and lacking warmth.
Emma explained how the musicians came together, 'The studio is owned jointly by Mat and Mark Neary the bass player who are long-time friends, so that's the rhythm section, and they brought in Adam Chetwood on guitar, who is very quiet but when he plays… wow. When we had a break Adam and I would talk about our mutual love of Lyle Lovett and John Hiatt, Son Volt, Wilco and people like that, so it gave him an insight of where I was coming from.'

The album has a very laid-back, late-night vibe running through it, that's not to say it doesn't have its rockier up-tempo moments too. The band were very understated in a good way. I put that to Emma….'I hope so. I hope when people are listening to it, they get that relaxed late night feel, we went into it in a very unplanned way and worked from our hearts really. The band kept saying they wanted my voice to be the main feature on the record. They made the point that the recording was about me, they really pepped me up. When the band re-invented the music for Nuthin' I Won't Do which I had recorded with Terry Reid they really funked it up and gave it a Northern Soul feel. Terry loves it.'

Emma is clearly relishing the attention her music is receiving, ' I know this is a moment in time and I'm feeling so lucky. I'm focusing on enjoying it' she says. I suspect it's the beginning of several such moments, I'm sure in about eighteen months' time Emma will be recording the follow up.

I wondered how much Emma felt her experiences as a backing singer with people as diverse as Pig Iron had helped her to arrive where she is now. 'It's definitely helped, it's about knowing your voice, your instrument. In a way maybe that makes me comparable to the guys I worked with because we know our instrument enough to use it to create emotion. When I was a backing singer, I don't think you ever heard me doing straight doobie do dowops. Everything I did was to create texture, depth and colour, light and shade, my voice was really employed as instrumentation. It gives you confidence in the studio too. On this recording we used a mic called a Ball and Biscuit, a big Bakelite ball shape with a valve on top, the sound is so crystal clear, you can hear the breathes and everything. Once it's mixed in it gets fixed. I think that added to that late night feeling.'

Emma has also got her self well organised on the business side of things, signing with Selectohits and Proper Music for distribution in the USA and Europe respectively and engaging a top line USA based PR company. Having been nominated for the Emerging Artist category in this years Blues Federation Awards as well the future looks very bright for Emma. My advice is to enjoy the fruits of her labours, let everything sink in and in about eighteen months I expect her to go to the studio having learned so much from this experience and record an even better album. In the meantime we all wish her well.

www.emmawilson.net

NO STONE UNTURNED

IAN SIEGAL

by **Barry BluesBarn Hopwood**
Art by **Brian Kramer**
Images by **Rob Blackham**

An absolute dream come true for me, to not only review Ian's new album but to get to interview him about it, especially as I've heard some of the tracks live at a recent gig I put on with him. Anyone that knows me, knows how big a fan I am of this master craftsman, one of the best lyricists this little Island has ever produced!

Introductions over, I ask Ian how he's doing? How's the gruelling UK & Europe tour going?

"The tour's going great, in respect of the audiences but I'm suffering a bit with a couple of broken ribs from a slip whilst loading gear, which isn't great when you sing for a living.

We turn to his latest 'Stone by Stone' album release. Already topping international blues charts, it marks his thirteenth release, and is truly excellent. I ask how did this come about and what was the inspiration behind it (One of my favourite things about Ian, is he tells it how it is):

"Basically my wife Kendall wanted a holiday in California and Robin Davey and Greta Valentin had just opened a new recording studio out there, so I thought whilst I'm there why not record a new album. Once in the studio, the songs come quite naturally plus there was a great fun-time house feel about the place and it was as if the stars were aligned. The way all the musicians came together, through various phone calls and conversations."

I confirm my own thoughts mirror this feeling and you can hear that on the very first track, 'Working On A Building,' which sounds like he was having fun from the start:

"Yes, Jimbo Mathus came up with the first line and I just filled in the rest, with Jimmie Wood on harp and vocals, JJ Holiday on electric guitar."

I tell Ian that the second track on the album is my personal favourite. It's like I've waited all my life to hear this, a very gospel-driven track with the divine Shemekia Copeland grabbing my heart strings with her vocals and the ever- impressive Stephen Hodges on drums. To me this track is worth buying the album alone for, I say:

"Yes, it's probably my favourite track, as well as KK'S Blues, which Jimbo wrote - a truly wonderful song," he says to my relief.

Two other tracks, grab my attention and I run them past him; 'The Fear' and 'I'm The Shit' just confirm for me what I've known for a long, long time that Siegal is a prolific lyricist. 'Your way of writing sits very well into my ear canals and attitudes multiply, you with Jimbo is just another perfect pairing in life like strawberries and cream, Jagger and Richards,' I suggest in genuine seriousness.

"Like I said, everything came together…," he repeats.

With one cut, the fifth track on the album a cover, Psycho, I'm curious about how it came to be:

"This is an old sixties song which Elvis Costello covered. Quite a dark story allegedly based on true events and fits very well."

'Gathering Deep,' with Jimbo on vocals as well as mandolin, gives off the same vibe of having a good time whilst recording. I can almost picture two friends sitting on a porch just singing, I suggest:

"Yes. Thank you, we are," he replies with a laugh.

Another track 'This Heart,' had me doubting myself, thinking, I know this song, I'm sure I've heard it on an album before. Then I remembered, years ago I got a copy of a bootleg album called shake Hands with the Devil, recorded at the Running horse in Nottingham and it's on that.... one of those memories that just take you back to a place

and time in life:

"Yes! I first recorded it on an album called 'Standing In The Morning' on a German record label, but they are as hard as hens teeth to get hold of. So, every now and again, I can put a track on a new album. Not being lazy. Just, it fits," he confirms.

I tell Siegal how much I love it when he does that live, when he slaps and plays his guitar like some kind of percussion instrument. Speaking of which, the song 'Holler' on 'Stpne by Stone' is going to be another new favourite of mine, another gospel sounding, spiritual-lifting tune. I'm tempted to ask if there are any songs that didn't make it on the newalbum:

"Errrr, there was one called 'The Talk Song.' But that's another story," he quips with another laugh.

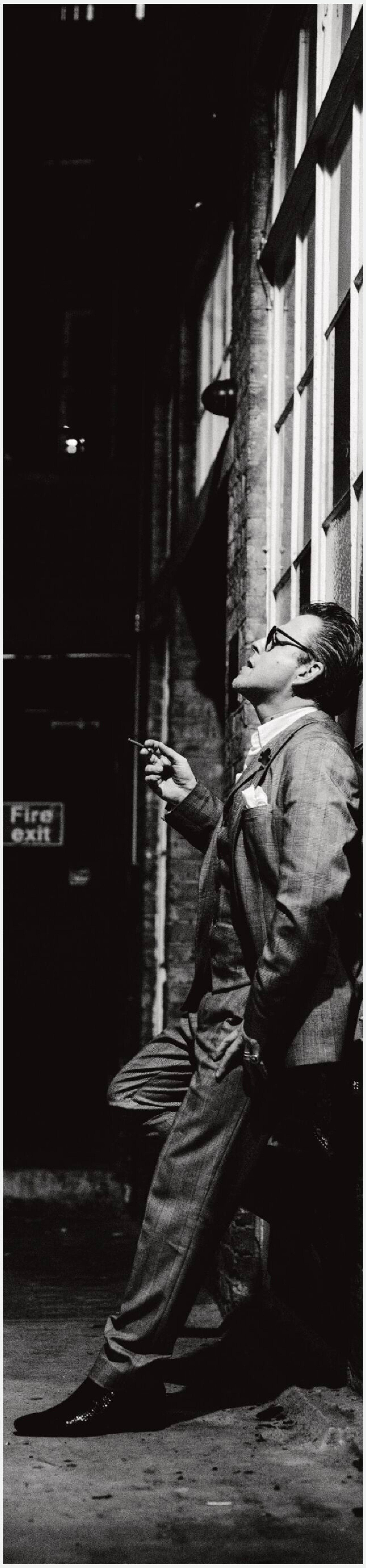
The album cover artwork is strikingly original, so I raise the subject next, adding that I love the album cover and wondering what's the story behind the picture:

"That's by Brian Kramer, I've known him for a long time and I've been loving his drawings I've seen him share. So, we got in touch. I think his inspiration was from a photo of me playing a gig, with what look like smoke around me, like I said, everything was aligned."

With a tiring schedule of gigs behind him and more to come, I thank Ian for his time before concluding: 'Thank you, Ian. You've made this old music fan very happy by bringing out a new album, eleven great tracks. We haven't discussed them all but isn't that what we have to do, leave the punters wanting more.' As we part, I ask, are you going to be touring still?

"Yes I'm back here in June, July and August, playing at venues near mostly all of you soon, as well as playing some festivals. Cheers, Barry."

For information, make no mistake, 'Stone By Stone' is a cracker. My view of the album is this: its gospel, its Blues, its Ian Siegal. It's Great. It's 10 out of 10. What more could you ask for?



Ian Siegal album cover art alternatives

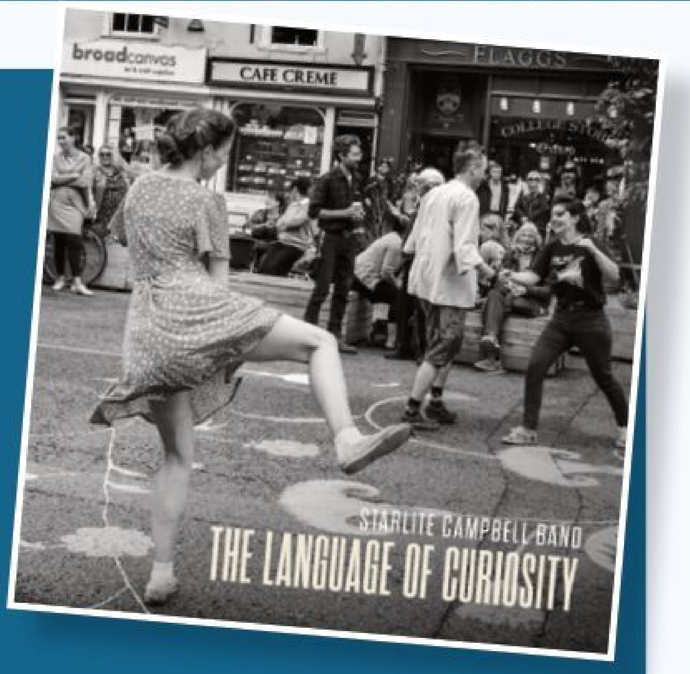
When creating the album cover art for Ian Siegal's release; Stone By Stone, I really wanted to crack the code to find the right image that represented Ian and this album. I went through the process of drawing dozens of sketches and inking a bunch of pieces that I thought were very good but didn't have that "thing" we were seeking. This was an important project for me, to have my art represent a Blues artist I greatly admire, enjoy, and has a notable reputation. It had to be simple, elegant, timeless, and very recognizable in likeness and essence. When I started playing with the "open arms" drawing, I felt it all click and was glad the process took me there. Now looking back on the alternative drawings, I enjoyed creating those as well. But the end result is VERY satisfying and looks amazing the way Greta Valenti framed it all up with the album cover design and 1930's style Art Deco ethic. This is just a couple of the alt illustrations.

Brian Kramer

BLUES REVIEWS

STARLITE-CAMPBELL BAND

THE LANGUAGE OF CURIOSITY



INDEPENDENT

Husband and wife team, Suzy Starlite and Simon Campbell have just released their latest album. They have written all the lyrics and music on this ten-song album. Distant Land kicks off the album with a nice steady rhythm, being helped along by some great vocals from Simon. It sort of eases you in gently before building into a blues/rocker. Gaslight, has more of a traditional R 'n ' B feel to it. More gutsy and bluesy that almost reminds me of The Allman Brothers Band. So now you can understand just how good this track is. The kind of tune you want blasting out on a warm summer's day as you drive down open roads. Suzy and Simon share the writing duties as well as vocal duties, this comes across in the songs so well, they know each other and what works, bouncing ideas around creating great songs such as these. Bad Sign has the hallmarks of a blues song in the title. But this song has a far more mellow edge, with lovely guitar running through the middle section.

"Put this on your list!"

I'm liking how this album twists and turns in an almost unconventional way. Stone Cold Crazy has a live setting wrapped around it. I sincerely hope they include this in a gig because the audience will be on their feet in an instant. Growling dirty vocals and a thumping tempo keep this train right on the track. Throw in a bluesy guitar and you have a belting live anthem on your hands. Lay It Out On Me, is a dark blues song that you could imagine seeing someone perform in a 1950s blues club downtown. The smell of cigarettes and whiskey hanging in the air engulfing everyone as they sit glued to the artist pouring out their heart. That's what I like about this album, it's not an out-and-out blues album, it's an album of great tunes that lend themselves to blues/rock, boogie, and deep dark blues. Put this on your list.

STEPHEN HARRISON

BALTA BORDOYN & THE BAD BOYS

ROCK MY BLUES AWAY

BLUZTRACK

This album contains thirteen great blues tracks. The album never takes its foot off the gas. The way these guys intertwine I get the impression that they do a lot of musical improvisation, not because they aren't ready, but because they are so good. They can just keep going and keep taking it up another level, amongst themselves, just by playing together. The production manages to convey a time gone by but with every aspect of all contributor's crystal clear. Balta is a veteran Spanish blues guitarist who is a member of Los Peligroso Gentleman, he is a truly first rate, first call guitarist and Rock My Blues Away is the first album under his own name with his gang of trusty bad boys; Victor Puertas, Nil Majul and Aranu Julia on drums. The album under-scores one of the greatest truisms ever uttered by a musician "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing" An album that just keeps giving, each track brings its own visual to mind with I'll Be Glad When Your Dead You Rascal You, taking me straight to a Sunday afternoon pure clean dance hall, swing, fun with a bunch of happy folks dancing their socks off. Cold Women With Warm Hearts, a jazz bar, New-Orleans on a Sunday afternoon with a hot Smokey atmosphere, dark, up close hip swaying blues and so on. Right Place Wrong Time is when the blues woozy floozy takes to the floor, she just gotta dance, hot sticky, sexy cool blues! If you like your Blues albums with a nod to the past greats of this genre, that is sophisticated in sound delivery with atmosphere by the bucket load, then get this album…I know someone who is going to just love this album and I cannot wait to share it with you Bazza of the Blues Barn. If you can get an acoustic set with these guys, I'm coming…

JEAN KNAPPITT

BANANAFISH

BOSTON BANANAFISH

TREATED AND RELEASED RECORDS

This double album is a 25th-anniversary collection of songs that were previously only available at the band's live shows. The band is fronted by Fordham Murdy, more commonly known as Reverend Freakchild. He wrote all the music and lyrics for the songs except one. The opening track, What's Been Going On? Has a slight Allman Brothers feel to it. Believe me, there ain't nothing wrong with opening an album like that. Luck And Work is such a funky track, a real mover and shaker. Dan Simone brings his keyboard skills to the fore, allowing the rest of the band to jump in at any given moment to pepper the song with their own individual talents. This album is so laid-back, blues, funk, and a pinch of soul running right through it are just a joy to behold. The majority of the songs are short, with no long solos, no filler, just snappy blues and funk that has put this writer in such a good mood. The longest track on the album is Talk Good About Me, which is the only live cut on the album. Nobody's Fault for me is the standout track on what is a fantastic album. It has all the ingredients, blues, funk, and soul but with a greater tempo and comes across as a sit-down and listen to fully appreciate it feel about it. Well-crafted-well-honed and brilliantly produced, the first CD show how capable this band is of producing music to the highest quality. The album finishes with a very short rendition of With A Little Help From My Friends, the Joe Cocker version. CD 2 is an album of instrumentals, a kind of jam session if you like. This shows another side to this brilliant band's capabilities. I've loved every minute of this album. I'm certain, given the chance, so will you.

STEPHEN HARRISON

DANA FUCHS

BORROWED TIME

RUF RECORDS

Dana Fuchs new release is an eclectic mix of styles and genres rooted in Southern Rock style. Here on these twelve well-crafted songs, it is all about the velvety vocal tones of this most extraordinary singer and her great

band. It's a homage to her hometown of Wildwood in Florida where she grew up and her musical influences, there's something for any music lover on this one. The opener, Blue Mist Road opens quietly with dulcet tones matching ethereal guitar backing, then at the bridge just sets off a pace with guitar solo matching a catchy backbeat, shades of Steve Earl on this one. Borrowed Time is anthemic, Dana delivers this with a punchy vocal, and acoustic rootsy take a crowd pleaser, the chorus is infectious. Call My Name slows the pace on this honest ballad. Curtain Close, takes a more mellow tone a great rhythm section brings this together then there is a superb guitar solo, full of different layers. Bobby Harlow Producer has caught the essence of Dana's live shows out them in a box and taken them to the studio. No more so than on the rocky deliveries to Double Down On Wrong and Hard Road definite power-driven tunes, highlights. Last To Know, sees Dana delivering nasty blues lyrics to a brilliant backbeat. Her raw vocals are no better than on the rootsy Lonely Lie. Final track, Star epitomizes what makes a good song great, sliding guitar, sultry vocals, this release packs a punch, highly recommended.

COLIN CAMPBELL

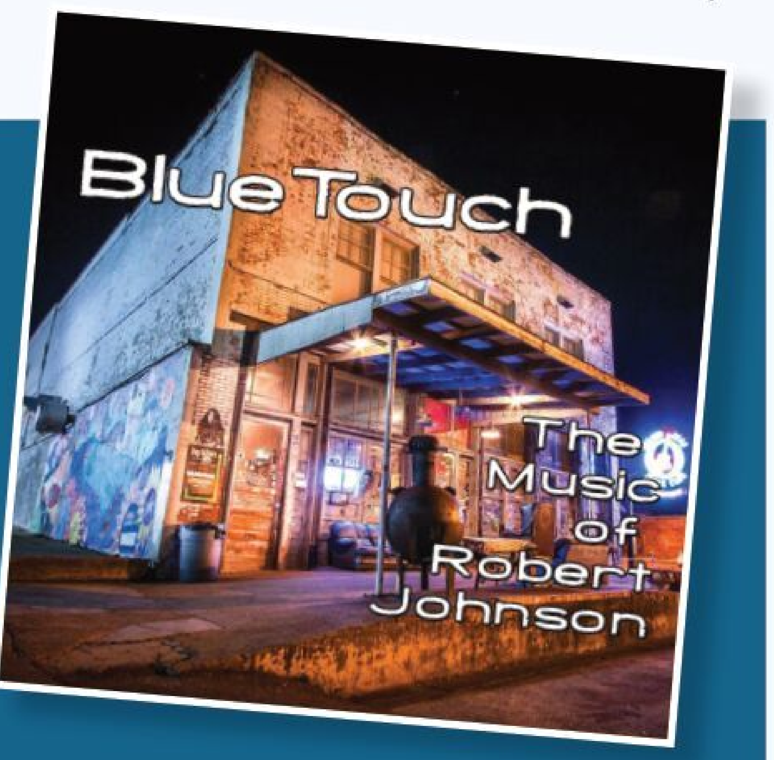
JAMES OLIVER BAND

LIVE @ THE EARL HAIG

INDEPENDENT

James Oliver revealed this was not supposed to be an album, but we liked the energy. Well, the energy here could generate a town. This was recorded by Barry Morris and exemplifies what three talented musicians can do, mixing blues tunes, rockabilly and more. Thirteen tracks of pure power and with incendiary guitar fretwork at times this is amazing. James is lead singer and guitarist; he is a quality entertainer. Joining James are Patrick Farrell on bass guitar and Mark Kemlo on drums. The band here is amazing and James puts his interpretation on Danny Gatton tunes, Muddy Waters, and others. Opener, Linda Lu sets the tone with a rockabilly riff. Walk Don't Run is an up-tempo number full of power. American Cars has reverb, great guitar licks and quirky lyrics, the rhythm section take this to another level. Similarly on Sugar Coated Love a bluesy tune. Albatross slows the tempo, James's chord structure and feel for the tune are palpable. My Own Business just allows James to go wild on his outstanding guitar technique. Brand New Cadillac is a great tune. Mean Little Momma ups the tempo an audience favourite. Goofin' Around is a guitar masterclass. Miserlou is a surfing tune. Honey Hush is an interpretation of Johnny Burnette song, superb riffs. You Never Can Tell is fast and furious. Last tune is, My Baby Left Me, the band on top form. Pure genius, live music as it should be played, excellent release.

COLIN CAMPBELL



BLUE TOUCH

THE MUSIC OF ROBERT JOHNSON

Independent

Can there be any readers unfamiliar with the music of Robert Johnson? Even if you've not actually heard Po' Bob himself, chances are you're familiar with his songs, most of the leading (and not so leading) blues acts of the last 50 years or so have covered them. But actual albums consisting solely of Johnson's songs are not so common, and this fourteen-track set makes me wonder why more haven't already tried it. It's a natural. Blue Touch, a four-piece UK blues-rock outfit, have been lauded in these pages before, and on this evidence, it's not hard to understand why.

> ***"Every track indeed a winner!"***

They take the elements of Johnson's music and emphasise different aspects – and the fact they have a wonderful female vocalist in Andrea Maria adds a different dimension, apparent immediately right from her first few notes on the opening Preachin' Blues and again on the re-gendered Kind Hearted Fella. Co-lead singer (and guitarist) Neil Sadler is no slouch either. They go for the jugular with the electric slide playing on If I Had Possession Over Judgement Day (sounding more than a little like Eric Clapton and Cream) and turn 32-20 Blues into a strutting slab of mid-tempo blues-rock, with echoes of Little Feat to these ears, mixing fierce, dirty electric slide with a dobro and a cooking rhythm section. By this time I'm eagerly scanning the track listing and wondering just how they're gonna tackle the remaining ten tracks…And they don't disappoint: a pulsating Walking Blues, a driving Travelin' Riverside Blues, a loose Malted Milk, a grooving, Elmore James-ish Steady Rollin' Man . Every track indeed a winner...

NORMAN DARWEN

MARKEY BLUE RIC LATINA PROJECT

JUMPIN' THE BROOM

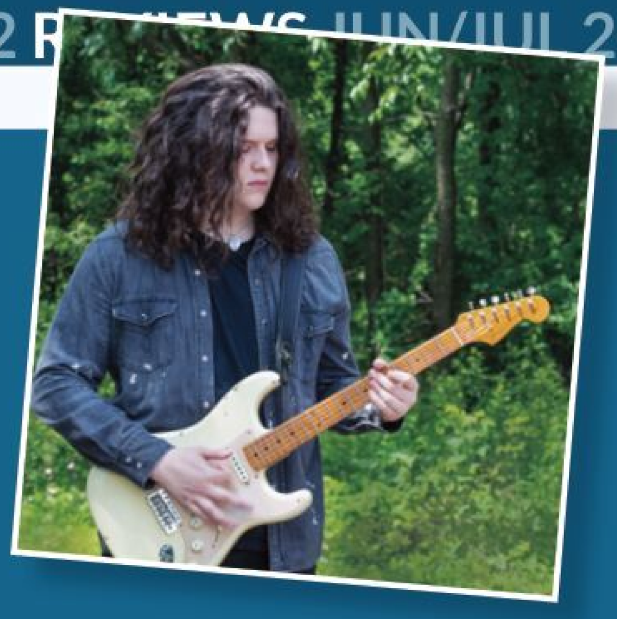
SOULOSOUND RECORDS

Nashville-based Jeannette Markey (Blue) and Ric Latina celebrate ten years of making music together with this excellent album. It's their fourth album, but their first as a married couple. On an all-original set, Ric's guitar soar over the rhythm section and horns, while Markey's voice conveys the lyrics clearly and soulfully. Bad For Real chugs along over a great guitar riff as Markey tells us about someone whose life is a real mess, Ric adding some slide work to the mix too. The horns and keys lay down a classic soul strut on Hanging On which Markey sings very soulfully whilst sounding vulnerable at the same time, Ric adding a beautifully poised solo, a fine track. The band rocks things up a bit as Markey opines that "the grass ain't always greener, When It's Blue". Slide is featured on Little Betty, the tale of a wayward girl who frightens and fascinates the local boys in equal measure and we also hear about a Lowdown Voodoo Woman over ominous chords and some flute in the background. Markey warns that it will take a whole lot of loving if you want to Be With Me, a solid up-tempo piece with the horns again prominent, while she also declares that she is the Right Kind Of Woman, but unfortunately, he is not the right kind of man for her, the song graced by a solo by guest Dana Robbins, long-time sax player for Delbert McClinton. You Got The Blues has the most obvious blues credentials, notably in the guitar/horn's break-down mid-tune. Crying Out Loud opens with fluid guitar and Markey's vocals (both lead and backing vocals) are excellent, making this another standout track. The album closes with a soulful ballad, Where Are You, as Markey wonders where her ex might be tonight, although she does not really want to know; again, the vocals are excellent, conveying the essence of the song perfectly, as is Ric's fine solo. A very enjoyable album, well worth seeking out.

JOHN MITCHELL

PIERCE DIPNER

GOIN' BACK



INDEPENDENT

Pierce Dipner is a teenage guitarist from Pennsylvania, and this is his debut album, following a 4-track EP (Get Out Of My Life) back in 2019. Pierce sings in a clear, strong and unmannered style and it is quite difficult to square those assured vocals with his young age. Pierce is backed by Joe Munroe on keys, Arnold Stagger on bass and Blaise Lanzetta on drums, plus horns on three covers. The horns add groove to the light and jaunty cover of Stevie Wonder's Higher Ground as Pierce plays some high-pitched slide on a track which runs to six minutes. Justin Townes Earle's Memphis In The Rain is a short but sweet cover to which the horns add a soul-ful feel before they drive a quite superb reading of Sean Costello's No Half-Steppin', Pierce's vocal and guitar work outstanding on a song that is a personal favourite of this reviewer.

> ***"A very promising debut indeed"***

The originals cover the gamut of blues styles, from the opening shuffle Fool's Gold to the blues-rock guitar riffs of Nobody But Myself To Blame which also features organist Joe Munroe in full Jon Lord (Deep Purple) mode. The slide-driven Empty Bed Blues is clearly inspired by Elmore James and is an absolute treat to hear as Pierce lets loose on his cigar-box guitar; in contrast Pierce turns down both volume and speed for some subtle and emotional guitar touches on the slow blues Tore Us Apart while Won't You Come Home is another song about rejection, played to a rolling rhythm with a great solo, those three songs perhaps demonstrating that, despite his young age, Pierce has already been scarred by relationships! We're Not Leaving is a catchy, chugging rocker that celebrates a night on the town hearing live music, the combination of guitar and piano making it hard to sit still and the title track Goin' Back a jagged rocker with a grungy feel as Pierce pours it on in an extended solo. A very promising debut; indeed, expect to hear a lot more about this young man.

JOHN MITCHELL

ESBE

I MIGHT BE DREAMING

NEW CAT MUSIC

The surreal and the sublime meld together to mutate into sub-real form on this exquisitely talented artist's latest entrancing record. Esbe is an artist who weaves a magical sonic spell on songs infused with languid longing and smouldering passion. Opening song Cry From The Soul invites the receptive listener into her enchanting realm of sound as the title song's follow up movement of music captures the senses with its

Q&A WITH joanne shaw taylor

WHICH THEATRE WAS THIS LIVE ALBUM RECORDED AT? HAVE YOU PLAYED THERE BEFORE?

The show was recorded at The Franklin Theatre in Franklin, Tennessee. It was my first time playing there but I've visited Franklin before. It's a beautiful, quaint little town just outside of Nashville and the theatre is wonderful.

THE BAND THAT ACCOMPANIES YOU ON STAGE, DO YOU RECORD AND TOUR WITH THEM ALL THE TIME?

No, this was my first time working live with these musicians. I've worked in the studio with some of them before, for example, Steve Mackey who played bass on my last album "The Blues album" and Rob McNelley on second guitar who played on my "Wild" album. I also wrote a song with Rob for that album. Both Kim and Devonne sang back ups on my last album. Also, Dave McMurray is a Detroit legend I've been hearing about for years so it was an honour to have him come out and perform.

YOU WROTE AND RECORDED YOUR FIRST ALBUM AT AGE SIXTEEN, DID YOU ALWAYS HAVE THIS SELF-CONFIDENCE THAT YOU POSSESS TODAY?

I wrote and recorded my first album when I was 21. I wouldn't say I've ever been that confident to be honest. I've always loved what I do, and I've always strived to learn more and push myself.

HOW MUCH OF AN INFLUENCE HAVE KENNY, MIKE AND JOE HAD ON YOUR CAREER?

Kenny, he was a very early influence of mine. Ledbetter Heights was one of the first blues albums I ever heard, which also Jimmy Wallace, who is on keys also performed on. That was a big album for me, and I think it was especially important that I was able to see people my own age playing blues. My relationship with Joe has been well documented at this point. He obviously continues to be a very important person in my life and career. Mike, I only met recently but have been hearing about for a very long time. He's one of the greatest singers alive in my opinion so naturally I was thrilled he agreed to be a part of both the album and this DVD.

IF YOU COULD PLAY ANY VENUE IN THE WORLD, WHERE WOULD IT BE?

The Roadhouse in Camden, I've always loved that place. Carnegie Hall would probably be a bucket list gig for me.

SUMMERTIME, WRITTEN BY GERSHWIN HAS BEEN RECORDED BY MANY GREAT ARTISTS INCLUDING LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND ELLA FITZGERALD. YOU PLAY IT AS A BLUES NUMBER, DID YOU DRAW ANYTHING FROM THE LIKES OF LOUIS AND ELLA WHEN YOU RECORDED IT?

I'm a huge Ella fan so that was a little bit intimidating to take on that song. I'll never sound like Ella, so I just tried to not over think it and approach it naturally in my own style. Her version is still the best in my opinion!.

Joanne Shaw Taylor's new live album "Blues From The Heart" is released on CD + DVD, and CD + Blu-ray formats by KTBA Records on June 10th via www.ktbarecords.com

IMAGE: KIT WOOD

tonal tendrils twisting and releasing dreamy moments of rapture. A significantly talented musician and graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, who won the Julian Bream prize for guitar, it's as a multi-faceted composer at which Esbe now excels where she develops soundscapes overlayered with her creamy toned, purring angelic vocal. Moreover, as this I Might Be Dreaming album displays, she is a one woman show arranging, producing, recording, mixing, and composing this recording. Also, an exhibited artist, she creates her album artwork and listening to No Desire belies her passions for everything that she involves herself in. It's a masterly recording where every note makes a lasting mark on the ear as the melodrama of I Needed You, A Lonely Star, and Whisper In Solitude gets pleasingly under the skin to sentiently seep into the soul of the listener. Both Breathe and Restless are as apposite in title as they are in sound closing a rare discovery of music performed by a singular songstress.

PAUL DAVIES

LEVEE TOWN

TRYING TO KEEP MY HEAD ABOVE WATER

HUDTONE RECORDS

Blues rock, sometimes heading towards the heavier end of said spectrum and sometimes more rock n roll inflected, from this well-established Kansas City outfit. Locked Up For Days, a reflection on the hopefully now long-gone coronavirus era, will appeal to anyone missing their regular Johnny Winter fix since the great man's passing. Little Milton cover Lookin For My Baby slightly slows down the immortal riff from Tore Down, while maintaining the 'feel like this when my baby can't be found' lyrical sentiment. Gala wouldn't have been out of place on a Dave Edmunds album from the late 1970s. Outside Child is a nice take on the much-neglected genre of western swing, and the instrumental number Tarantino is a proof positive that guitarist and main songwriter Brandon Hudspeth, pictured on the band's website playing a Gretsch, is a fan of Brian Setzer. Close attention to the words of She Might Kill You will, if nothing else, make you more cautious about who you hook up with on Tinder. Look out brother, indeed. The set closes with a faithful if fairly polite reading of the Freddie King standard The Stumble, dating from the period when the Texas Cannonball was still spelling his name 'Freddy' on album sleeves. While the set lacks any obvious killer punch, this eclectic collection could be of interest to a wide range of Americana lovers beyond the purist blues community.

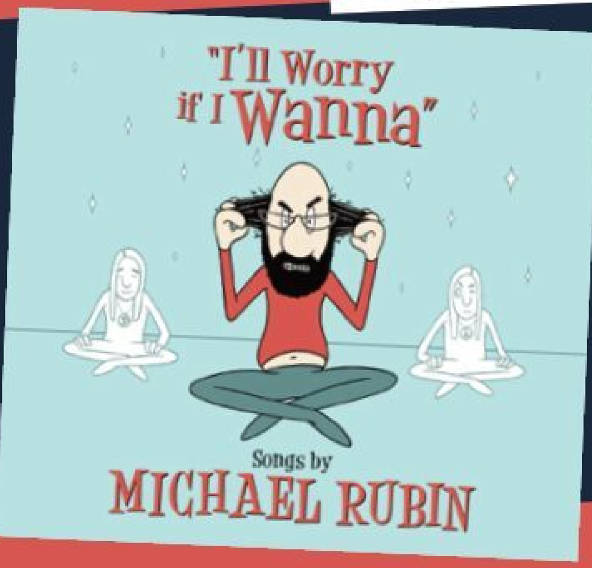
DAVID OSLER

DIUNNA GREENLEAF

I AIN'T PLAYIN'

LITTLE VILLAGE FOUNDATION

Houston, Texas-based Diunna Greenleaf has three BMAs to her name, but remains somewhat under-recorded, so it is great to hear her new disc, a fine collaboration with Kid Andersen's team at Greaseland. The core band is Kid on guitar, Jim Pugh on keys, Jerry Jemmott on bass and D'Mar on drums, a dream team, ably supported by horns on most tracks. Diunna wrote four strong songs: Running Like The Red Cross is a wonderful soul/gospel piece with harmonies provided by The Sons Of The Soul Revivers; Answer To The Hard Working Woman is a funky, horn-fuelled statement of intent to gain independence from a lazy man; Sunny Day Friends has a light, jazzy feel from the piano, guitar and sax, underpinned by the bubbling bass lines, as she warns against those friends who disappear when things get tough; she revisits the theme of an old Willie Dixon tune, this time seen from the position of the wife betrayed by the Back Door Man. If It Wasn't For The Blues works well for Diunna's voice, in a horn arrangement that includes flute. Diunna takes I Wish I Knew How It Felt To Be Free to church and then delivers a spare reading of

MICHAEL RUBIN
I'LL WORRY IF I WANNA
OUT NOW


MICHAELRUBIN1.BANDCAMP.COM

SELINA & THE HOWLIN DOGS

BLUES REVISITED

Independent

The album Blues Revisited has been in the works for nearly twenty years. After forming in 2002 the band has been steadily building a live following, with influences that add much to the aural soundscapes on show. There is a massive blues influence, evident in the wah-wah enhanced rhythm and lead guitar work of Alan Burgin, and the sharp bass and drums of Mark Peace and Tobias Andersson. However, the photogenic and talented singer Selina Arch has a voice that takes in blues and jazz phrasing, as well as a huge rock and roll presence on many of the self-penned songs. Songs such as opener Slow Train Blues show the influence of Janis Joplin, and the huge sound that Led Zeppelin could produce, the influence of funk, and Stevie Ray Vaughan is evident in the guitar work on Never Get Over You, particularly in the lively opening and soloing.

> ***"This album is a great listen, full of plenty of variety"***

Stow is a medium-paced funk number, with jazz licks all over it, and It Hurts is a slow song that shows the band knows how to handle a slow blues. On The Line is a more commercial song, with some great playing, and would suit as either a radio song or a set-opener, with its perfect backing vocals and sound layering. Hip Hop Baby is a lively song with some great hip hop rhythms, the type of bubbling guitar figure and a slide guitar solo that keeps the audience listening. The rap vocal from Mark Peace also adds a new dimension and is the perfect foil to the vocals on display. This album is a great listen, full of plenty of variety, sounds and styles, with all four players, and their guests on fine form throughout. Hopefully, they won't leave it so long to release the follow-up.

BEN MACNAIR

DVD REVIEW

JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR

BLUES FROM THE HEART LIVE

Joanne Shaw Taylor has long been a bonafide blues artist. This live performance in a small theatre just highlights the very fact. Surrounding herself with brilliant musicians certainly helps, but it's Joanne who is the start of the show. Kicking off with Stop Messin' Around, Taylor revels in the status of blues guitarist rocking the venue with fantastic blues vocals and killer guitar. Taking centre stage is not always the easiest thing to do, especially when you have all the responsibility of being the band leader, but Taylor takes this in her stride. Throughout the gig, Joanne Shaw Taylor plays and sings with the chops of someone far more advanced in years, her command of the vocals and is exquisite. Born with gutsy gutter-like tones she rips through each song as if she and the band's life depend on it. Keep On Lovin'Me is taken from the highly acclaimed The Blues Album, released in 2021. Slightly funky, but still resonates with some dirty low-down blues, I love this track. In fact, I love everything about this DVD. Over the years Joanne Shaw Taylor has collaborated with quite a few well-known blues artists, and a few of them turn up and make a guest appearance. Kenny Wayne Shepherd joins the band on, Can't You See What You're Doing To Me, helping to bolster the evening's proceedings, taking it up a notch. The vocal duties shared, the guitar duels equaled, this is a magnificent performance by both of these artists. Mike Farris also joins Joanne, on, I Don't Know What You've Got. The first song she ever wrote from her debut album, White Sugar (2009), for me shows just how good she is. Bear in mind, that she was sixteen years old when she wrote and recorded this album. The final three songs see her mentor and best friend take to the stage, Joe Bonamassa. Ripping through the last few tunes brings to an end a wonderful evening performed by a true blues artist. Their rendition of the Gershwin classic, Summertime, is worth the entrance fee alone. Bravo.

STEPHEN HARRISON

DAVID LUMSDEN
"ROOTED IN THE BLUES"
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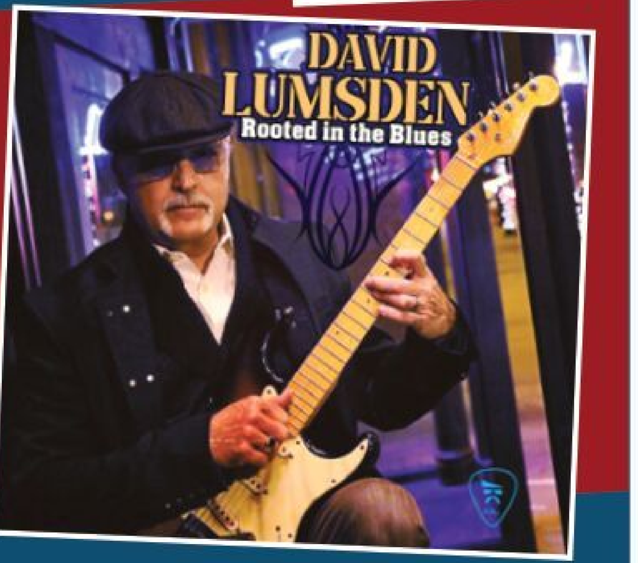
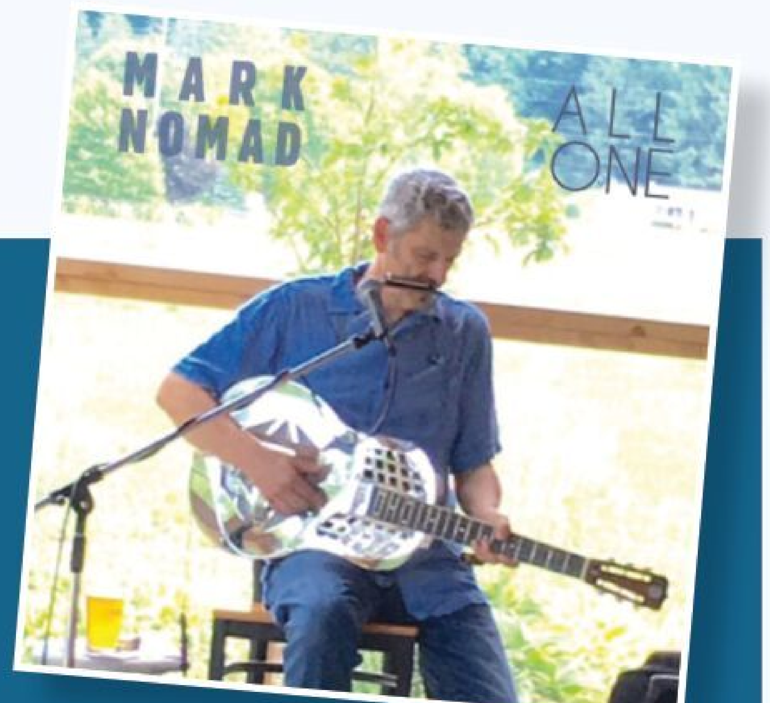
DAVIDLUMSDENGUITAR.COM





MARK NOMAD

ALL ONE

Blue Star Records

The album arrived with a description of Delta Blues & beyond. I could not have described it better myself. Mark Nomad sings, plays acoustic guitar, and harmonica on what is a truly solo effort in every sense of the term. Out of the eleven tracks on the album , Mark Nomad has written seven of them. The opening track, My Mind Gets To Wanderin' Nomad shows that he understands Delta and Country blues as much as the next guy. Simple finger-picking guitar, wonderful harmonica, and bluesy lyrics have already got me hooked. Delta blues and country blues are close bedfellows, go back to the 1920s and you'll see the closeness and rawness in every artist from Charley Patton to Blind Lemon Jefferson, and everyone in-between. As well as his own compositions there are notable tunes from a couple of Delta stalwarts. Mellow Down Easy by Willie Dixon is one such number.

> *"an album that has made this writer a very happy bunny indeed"*

Many people have covered tunes by Willie Dixon, but not so many get an acoustic outing. Nomad has released ten albums before this one, so he knows exactly what he's doing. Recording an album such as this, and covering tunes by artists such as Dixon makes me realize that this sorts the wheat from the chaff. One man and his guitar have long been the stereotypical notion of the Delta blues, what Mark Nomad does is bring it bang up to date while still having the same feel as artists did a hundred years ago. Go To Carry on is a fine example of this. Wailing blues harmonica coupled with deep gravelly vocals and fine acoustic guitar only further endorse Nomad as a true Delta blues artist. Throw in a couple of tunes by Mississippi Fred McDowell for good measure, and what you have is a stunning country blues offering. Nothing fancy, no long solos, no overdubs, just great country blues. The title track ends the album, an album that has made this writer a very happy bunny indeed. See for yourself, grab a copy.

STEPHEN HARRISON

the traditional I Know I've Been Changed, aided by Alabama Mike on vocals, two songs associated with the Civil Rights movement through famous versions by Nina Simone and The Staples Singers respectively. Revisiting songs from fellow Texans, Diunna covers Long John Hunter's up-tempo I Don't Care, and Johnny Copeland's anguished Let Me Cry; both feature brilliant horn arrangements but do check out Kid's guitar on the former and Jim's piano on the latter. The album opens with a Koko Taylor tune in which Diunna urges women to Never Trust A Man and closes with a song that was written by Chicago vocalist Deitra Farr but should equally apply to Diunna Greenleaf, the joyous and exuberant statement of intent, My Turn, My Time, indeed it should be, and this album should appear in those 'Best Of Year' lists.

JOHN MITCHELL

MICHELLE MALONE

1977

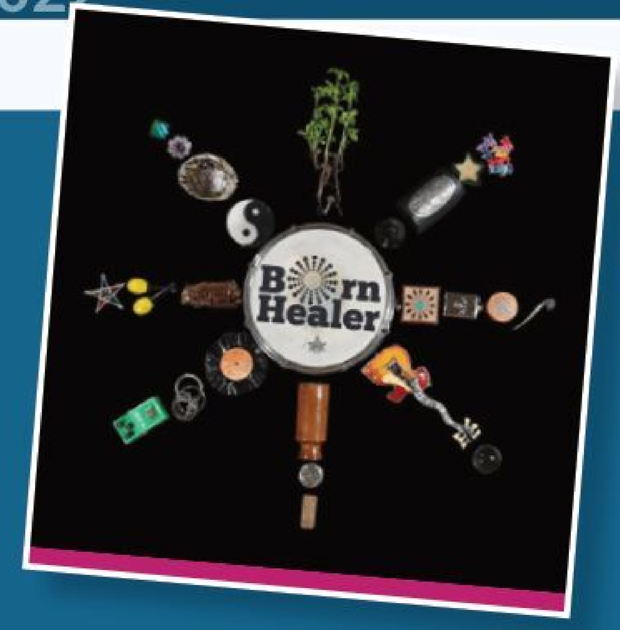
BFD/THE ORCHARD

Michelle Malone is an extremely talented singer songwriter and guitarist. On previous records she has mixed her musical style and plays the blues with an Americana twist. For her newest venture she has gone for an organic, raw acoustic feel that only accentuates what an amazing singer she is. Her vocals on the opener, Daggers is sultry and draws the listener in. a strong lyrically laden tune full of twists and full of emotion. Bodyguard continues a laid-back feel, but it is all in the story she tells and backing harmonies here, the vibe is infectious. Buck Knife Man is about the labours of working in a mundane job but relating to her father, very emotional and heart felt. Dust Bowl Man is a precautionary tale that is roots based. Even The Queen has a country vibe and is a good singalong track but gets rockier in the middle, great guitar solo. Georgia Made is also a well-crafted tune, a tale of living in that area, harmonica adds to the ambience. Know My Name ups the tempo keeping the releases' flow like a river. Not Who I Used To Be is another fabulous song reflecting on how people change but has a Laurel Canyon scene vibe. This is timeless music, Powderkeg is also a highlight, mixing bluesy tones and delivered so powerfully, it makes the listener just stand back and feel the goosebumps, a great tune. The release finishes with River Song, another melodic reflective tune.

COLIN CAMPBELL

BORN HEALER

HERBS, ROOTS, BARKS ETC



Independent

Six years after their highly acclaimed Til The Dawn, Born Healer return with a release of distinction rooted in blues. Lead singer Helen Turner has a wonderful bluesy soul toned voice adding that special feel to this tight band. Rhythm section of Marek Funkas on bass and Steve Weaver on drums and guitarist Iain Black make up a powerful back up. Forgot To Forget is the opener, a rocky blues number with soaring guitar licks mingling with sublime vocals. Grievin,' slows the tempo and has real live feel to it, loving the harmonies. New Moon Rising is a slow burner, sultry vocals here with driving beat. A highlight is, One Of These Days which is a multi-layered tune full of passion and riff laden; again, it accentuates the rhythm section, and the vocals are superb, well produced.

> *"Lead singer Helen Turner has a wonderful bluesy soul toned voice"*

Old Father Time is a rocky number a sure-fire crowd pleaser. Share Of Trouble really shows the singer's vocal range without overegging things, a slower melodic tune. Another highlight is, These Blues which has great tempo and sung with passion, a real feel for the song, another testimony to a good band. Wherever You May Be, is an ethereal tune that builds momentum and drive. Heavy Rumble opens with a resounding bass line then the band join in, and it is no holds barred, punchy powerful track. River '22 is the final tune, mixes rocky tones with excellent harmonies and a catchy chorus.

COLIN CAMPBELL

TOM RODWELL

WOOD & WASTE

FIREPLACE RECORDINGS

Tom Rodwell is an English singer-songwriter, guitarist and writer, who is presently moored in Auckland, New Zealand. Rodwell mines his crossover blues career with a writerly taste for the surreal on Wood and Waste, using his revival of blues music as a vehicle for dance on these nine self-penned original songs. Rodwell on vocals, Guitars, Vox, and Guitar Synth, is joined by notorious New Zealand free jazz multi-instrumentalists Chris O'Connor on drums & percussion and Jeff Henderson on marching bass drum. The album opens in fine style with Don't Be A Fugitive All Your Life, it's a slow-mo slice of gospel with a field holler feel, an easy blues riff and slippery slide guitar playing over some ramshackle percussion. Up next, Keep On Knockin delivers a breezy summer feel, some subtle Bo Diddley rhythms and floating guitar. A definite highlight is Touch Me Like A Teddy Bear with booming marching drum and splashing hi- hat pitted against Rodwell's unhinged guitar and gruffer vocals. The catchy She Got Me Boiling, a psychedelic calypso tale of cannibalism served on a bass-heavy guitar beat and carnival drums, while Small Town is a humorous slice of funk, with a deep bass line and some nifty work from guest Phill Dyson on the phased strat. The album closes with Dead End Road, with a haunting almost ethereal feel, Rodwell delivers a vivid piece of storytelling that reminds us that music is concerned with pain as

much as pleasure. An album that twists and turns in styles and feel, this won't appeal to the blues purists, but it is an interesting album that offers much to enjoy.

SHIRL

JANE LEE HOOKER

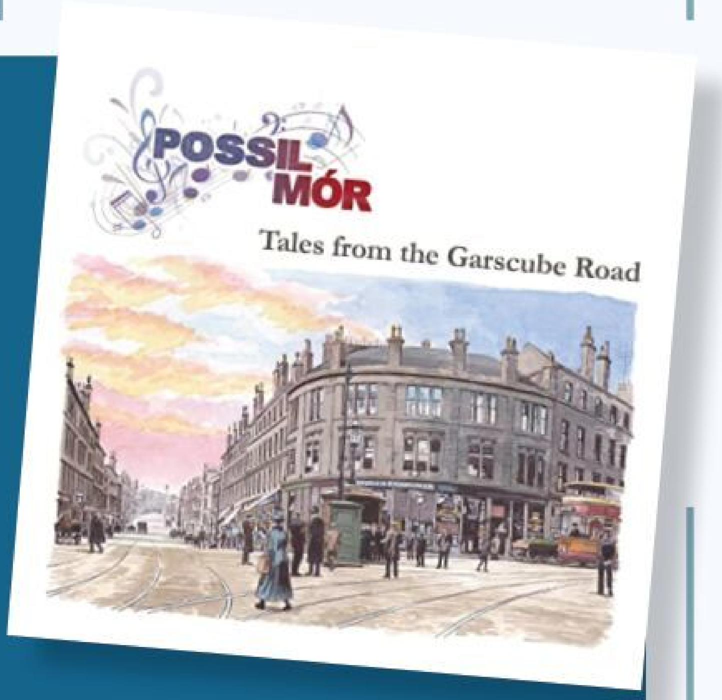
ROLLIN'

EAST RIVER TRUCKING RECORDS

Let's get rid of the various myths right now. Jane Lee Hooker is not the daughter or the niece of John Lee Hooker. They are, in fact, a five-piece band based in New York City. So, to the album. Rollin' kicks off with a high-intensity riff, banging drums, and a wailing vocal that could wake the dead. Lucky is one of those opening tracks that pins you to the wall straight away. Dana Athens has a vocal that can rip through a song like a knife through butter, and the band is right behind her every step of the way. Drive brings everything down to a more sedate level, with more than a hint of soul in the vocals and from the band. The band originates from New York City, and the album was recorded at a studio in Brooklyn. What that does is give you a fantastic insight into the soul of the band as well as the soul of their surroundings. Weary Bones has the sweet soul vibe coming mainly from the vocals of Dana Athens which is such a pleasant sound. The thing that most excites me about this band is that it can move from blues, blues/rock, soul, and gospel in the blink of an eye. Mercy, Mercy, Mercy, is one of only two songs that the band did not write themselves. I absolutely love this song and its delivery, highlighting just how tight Jane Lee Hooker is as a band. White Gold for me is the standout track on what is a brilliant album. Raw, gutsy, dirty blues that brings out the best of this fine group of musicians. The final tune on the album is a live recording done in the studio. Mean Town Blues, by Johnny Winter, has long been a favourite of mine, so I was so pleased to see it get an outing by this band. I'm really impressed with Jane Lee Hooker and the album, Rollin'. I'm sure that you will be too.

STEPHEN HARRISON

POSSIL MOR



TALES FROM THE GARSCUBE ROAD

Independent

This is a debut album by a Glasgow based band that is formed of duo Bill Alexander and Edith Casey who along with a fine assortment of support musicians have presented a unique album that mixes Soul, Rock, Blues, Folk and even some Scottish roots influences. Iit is a bit of a mishmash of sounds at times but is a very enjoyable and uplifting experience. All the material has been written by the duo with Edith handling all the vocals while Bill plays guitar and has production duties. As mentioned earlier this album does not follow any distinct pattern, it is a mixture of sweet melodies and other harder sounds, including the standout track Horse Dealing Blues which as its name suggests is a bluesy track with an excellent vocal from Edith.

> ***"this album is good fun and will appeal to Scottish Roots and Folk music fans"***

This is then followed by an instrumental, a traditional Scottish song called Ian Maclaren's Jig which incorporates Violin and Accordion, highlighting just how diverse the material is, at times it even has a theatrical edge to it. There are plenty of positives on show throughout the album, particularly the musicianship and song writing which is best highlighted on Letty's Song which highlights a family's upheaval and associated emotions in emigrating from Scotland to Nova Scotia prior to the First World War. Nothing here for pure blues fans but this album is good fun and will appeal to Scottish Roots and Folk music fans. The melodies are catchy and infectious and will have your feet tapping before too long.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

JEFF TUOHY

HUDSON DELTA

INDEPENDENT

For Hudson Delta, the singer-songwriter and guitarist Jeff Tuohy has gathered around him a host of musicians on an album that takes in singer-songwriter, Celtic, blues, jazz and soul in a sound that is both sophisticated and simple. With a sound born of New York, the storytelling narrative of Funeral Party, and Drunk Twice Today owe a lot to the energy of Bruce Springsteen, Counting Crows and Van Morrison, with the pedal steel guitar interjections of Jonathan Gregg and the piano of Patrick Firth adding to the energy of the colour of the song. The slow blues of Love's A Game drops the tempo, but not the passionate musical delivery, and The Devil's In New Orleans adds a Tom Waites low growling vocal to the song to tell a story, with a brass section adding to the ghostly tale. A full Celtic band is employed on Sea of Galilee, with a whistle, flute, fiddle, bodhran, and Uilleann Pipes creating a song that is part of a rousing sea shanty and part lost Pogue's song. The quality of the playing and the song writing across the full eleven tracks is universally strong. All of the songs contain plenty of ideas, but they all serve the purpose of the song, with few solos filling space. Occasionally the world is given an album that is both timely and timeless, local and worldly, and Hudson Delta is one of those releases.

BEN MACNAIR

TRUDY LYNN

GOLDEN GIRL

NOLA BLUE RECORDS

Houston blues scene stalwart Trudy Lynn turns 75 this year, but obviously subscribes to the 'age ain't nothing but a number' theory. This, her 18th album, is an impressive set of traditional

SELINA AND THE HOWLIN' DOGS
"BLUES REVISITED"
DEBUT ALBUM
OUT NOW
SELINAANDTHEHOWLINDOGS.COM

GHOST HOUNDS

YOU BROKE ME

Maple House Record

Newest release from Pittsburgh based sextet is a stunning nine track blues rooted extravaganza that mixes many music styles, there's rock, soul, gospel, and raw feeling in this melting pot. Lead singer Tre Nation sings with vigour and passion throughout. Johnny Babb and Thomas Tull are the lead guitarists. With the magnificent rhythm section of Bennett Miller on bass and drummer Blaise Lanzetta and keyboard player Joe Munroe this is one tight band recording this as live in studio. Baby We're Through, starts the pace, a heartbreaking song about breaking a relationship but what a backbeat, pacy opener. Their reinterpretation of Howlin Wolf's Smokestack Lightning is given their own slant with a heavy groove, outstanding.

> ***"Passionate, raw, and will get your head bobbing"***

You Broke Me slows the pace, introducing guitar solos with laid back keyboards, vocal delivery is emotive and powerful. Their version of Willie Brown packs a punch, some rock and roll here. Then there is an acoustic blues number, Through Being Blue Over You, sweet tones throughout. Lonesome Graveyard keeps a traditional blues vibe, Delta this time keeping a slow pace, but those vocals stay with the listener long after listening to the release stunning tune. On Your Trail has barrelhouse vibe, showcasing the whole band. Still You is a blues ballad with a smoky feel it's in the rhythm here. Last tune is a full band cover of Through Being Blue Over You given a New Orleans sleaze to the same tune earlier in the release. Passionate, raw, and will get your head bobbing, highly recommended, great tunes.

COLIN CAMPBELL

POSSIL MOR

TALES FROM THE GARSCUBE ROAD

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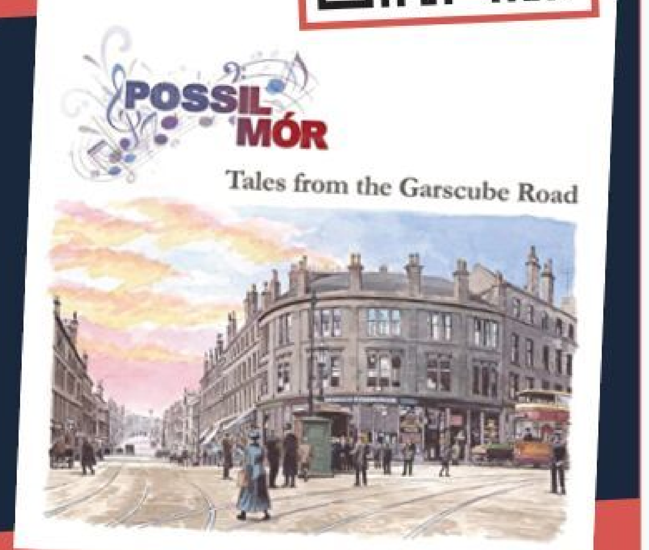
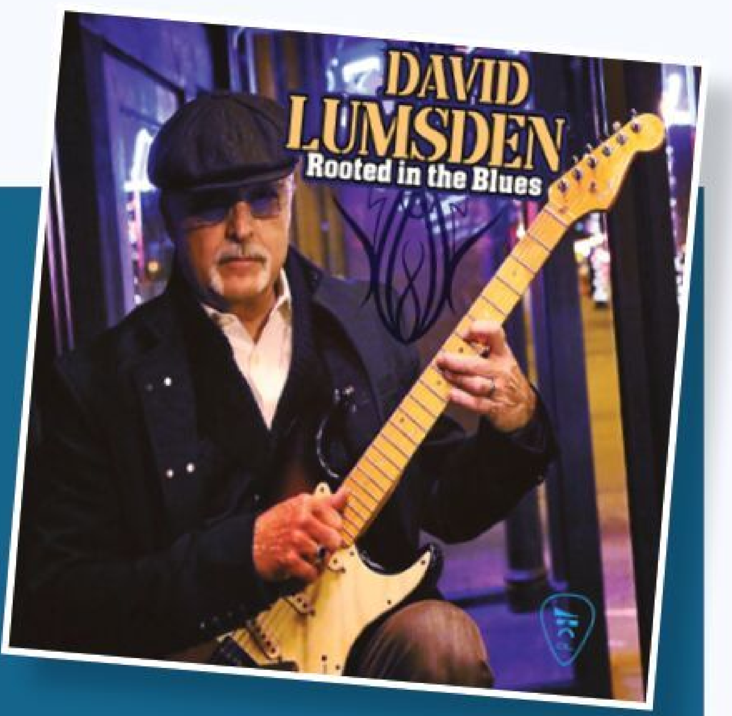




DAVID LUMSDEN

ROOTED IN THE BLUES

Independent

Like many young Americans Lumsden found his way to blues/rock through the British invasion of the 60's, Yardbirds, Cream, Mayall, Led Zep etc and then discovered the American originators, Robert Johnson, Wolf, Hooker, Broonzy etc. Later on, Freddie, Albert and BB King fired his imagination and he cut his teeth playing on the circuit with Hurricane Ruth. Opening track Eddy Clearwater's stomping I Wouldn't Lay My Guitar Down leaps out of the speakers featuring Chuck Berry guitar licks, barrelhouse piano and rumbling baritone sax. A lonesome train whistle introduces the self-penned Runaway (Blues Train) a speedy and exciting race to the end of the line featuring great picking from Lumsden and frantic drumming from Jim Engel.

"The material is varied, well chosen, and well played throughout"

Ruthless Boogie is great fun and a real toe tapper featuring Hooker style guitar riffs and swirling organ from Tim Bahn. Lieber and Stoller's classic Hound Dawg gets a slower, funkier treatment which works well and then we get a complete change with a beautiful, jazzy instrumental Your Memory. A heavy guitar riff intro's the bump and grind blues of Hooked On Something featuring guest vocalist Reggie Britton and suitably sturdy guitar from Lumsden. The material is varied, well chosen, and well played throughout with Lumsden's guitar work being particularly stellar. That guitar work dominates a cover of Becker/Fagen's Steely Dan instrumental Josie as Lumsden duels splendidly with Bahn's electric piano. Old chestnut Everyday I Have The Blues gets a good workout and then we get a fabulous instrumental tribute to Hendrix with Ode To Jimi aka Slow Burn featuring some familiar riffs lovingly delivered. A live recording of Dylan's track Everything Is Broken featuring Kylan Davis' snarling vocals closes the album. Along with fine playing there is plenty of energy here and it should prove a winner for blues/rock lovers.

DAVE DRURY

guitar-driven blues and horn and keyboard-drenched soul, recorded and arranged with enough pizzazz to avoid that dreaded 'I've heard this one 100 times before' vibe. The opener, Tell Me, is a fair taster of what you get on this CD as a whole; an admonition to an unfaithful man delivered over the kind of sonic backdrop that wouldn't be out of place on a Jimmie Vaughan recording. If Your Phone Don't Ring is a brilliantly menacing minor key break-up blues reminiscent of the best 1970s work of Ann Peebles. Another highlight is Live With Yourself, a clever song that put me in mind of Bettye LaVette's cover of Dylan's Things Must Change, with that observation meant as high praise indeed. While Lynn's unrelenting powerhouse vocals make her the undoubted star of the show, guitar geeks will want to keep an ear out for hugely under-rated Strat merchant Anson Funderburgh, who guests on five tracks and gets a 'feat' credit on three of them. Yates McKendree, the other main guitarist, is no slouch either. The two of them work well together on gospel-tinged closing number Life Goes On, with strong vocals from Lynn to boot. I liked this one a lot, and if this is your kind of musical territory, so will you.

DAVID OSLER

PRAKASH SLIM

COUNTRY BLUES FROM NEPAL

DEVILLE RECORDS

There are many new blues artists around and thank god for that, but what there does seem to be a lack of is a Country Blues artist with real authenticity. Step forward Prakash Slim. Hailing from Nepal, you may be forgiven for being a little apprehensive about his take on Country Blues. Fear not, this album is magnificent. The opening track, Blue Raga, is a lovely little instrumental ditty showing that Slim can play acoustic guitar well within the realm of Country Blues artists of yesteryear. As well as five original tracks by Slim, the album also contains tunes by the masters of Country Blues including, Bukka White, Charley Patton, and Robert Johnson. Moon Going Down (Charley Patton) has long been a favourite track of mine. When Slim performs these tunes from the masters, he's not just copying them for the sake of it, he stamps his own identity on these songs with a very firm hand. It is the understanding and feeling that Slim manages to pour into all of the songs on the album that convinces me that this guy can fly the flag for Country Blues for a very long time. Corona Blues, penned by Slim is one of the best of his original songs on the album. Prakash Slim brings his own interpretations to Country Blues while paying homage to the greats. Crossroad Blues and Me And The Devil Blues(Robert Johnson) have been covered by a multitude of artists, but these particular versions made me feel closer to Johnson than other artists have made me feel. It's the tone in his voice, the touch on the guitar, somewhat mythical as was Johnson in many ways. Police Dod Blues (Blind Blake) is a track that I've not heard in a very long time. Kudos Parkash for giving me a fantastic reminiscence. Two bonus tracks feature on the album, Bhariya Blues, and Garib Keto, both delivered in his native tongue round off a magnificent album. If Country Blues is your thing, look no further than Prakash Slim. Add this to your collection.

STEPHEN HARRISON

JACK BROADBENT

RIDE

CROWS FEET RECORDS.

Being an avid blues fan for the last forty years, people tend to know what I love, and with the introduction of social media sites I tend to get tagged in a lot of videos about artists that blow people's minds. One such artist was Jack about five years ago, playing slide guitar in Amsterdam and the first thing I noticed after his phenomenal playing was, that he was using a hip flask as a slide. Fast forward to today and here we have his latest offering, following on from Moonshine Blue. Straight from the off a driving, deep tone beat of guitar into the opening title track, Ride. A tale of adventure where Jack's voice slips into the song like melted chocolate over marshmallows. The hairs stand to attention on my arm and the back of my neck informing my senses, oh yes, we are gonna love this. I am not disappointed as the second song flows effortlessly in, called I Love Your Rock and Roll and, yes, we do Jack. Especially your guitar swashbuckling, so glad to be on this ride. Like any good album you should get a stylistic diversity here and there is, no more evident than on the velvety moody New Orleans which has me wishing I was there. I'm overly excited that there's still five more to come. Hard Living is basically what everybody is going through now and told here with a guitar that at times I swear is crying. I will never tire of a musician that can bring out emotions with an instrument and this track alone is worth buying the album for. I'm practically laying on the floor emotionally exhausted at the end till Jack picks me up with Midnight Radio and now I'm skipping to an up-tempo track, it's like riding the rapids of a raging river, twists and turns, ups and downs but forever flowing in the same direction. Baby Blue, followed by Grace To Me are silky rock/blues with some great mouth reeds being blown on the latter, Who Are You? Where we've come to calm waters and all I can say is what a ride.

BARRY BLUESBARN HOPWOOD

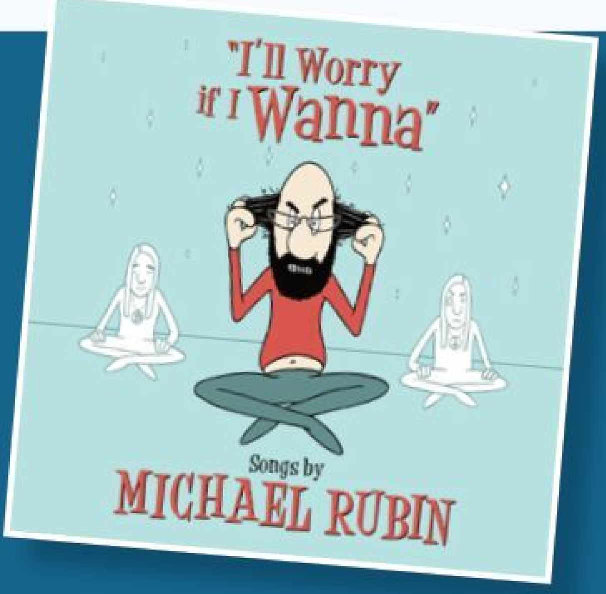
GA-20

CRACKDOWN

COLEMINE

In case you're not familiar with GA-20, the last album from this Boston, Massachusetts-based trio (their second) was 2021's tribute to Hound Dog Taylor set, released in a joint venture between Colemine and Alligator Records. That's not all you need to know, but it should certainly have got your interest. The present release spreads its net rather wider repertoire-wise, but retains the raw, earthy sound of its predecessors. Gone For Good maintains the presence of good old Chicago club blues with electric slide guitar and would have sat well alongside the tracks of the previous album, and that is indeed a compliment. This time around though, the band also heads down south to Louisiana, with Dry Run the kind of thing that might have turned up on a Jay Miller or Eddie Shuler tape in some long-forgotten studio, whilst Lloyd Price's hit Just Because is also noteworthy. The garage side of the band comes to the fore on the opener (also the last track, in a briefer reprise) Fairweather Friend, and Double Gettin' has something of a punky blues feel, which

MICHAEL RUBIN
I'LL WORRY IF I WANNA



Blind Raccoon

If you're looking to cheer yourself up with a reminder of how entertaining the blues can be, then try this. Michael Rubin is an utterly versatile harmonica player with a penchant for writing songs with a genuine humorous twist. His voice is rough, ready and makes you smile. First, consider the harp playing. Whatever amplification systems he uses to unleash those sounds, they're remarkable. On Kama Sutra Girl, (we never get bored – we just turn the pages…) a tongue-in-cheek dedication to 'you know what', the harmonica lets loose with a thick, greasy eminence possessed with the power of a brass section.

"a reminder of how entertaining the blues can be"

His band, including Mike Keller, guitar, Michael Archer on bass, Mark Hays, drums and Emily Gamble on keyboards with Dr. Sick on fiddle and Josh Fulero on percussion all deserve a well-earned mention. They're earthy, moody mature swingers who provide the perfect frame for Rubin's vibrant, complex solos. If you're searching for a blues category to place this CD in, it ain't an easy prospect. I was thinking of Louis Jordan, a dash of T-Bone Walker or Wynonie Harris. On the hilarious I Got a Beer Belly Baby, the overall sound is a much looser suggestion of the Fabulous Thunderbirds. This is blues you can really dance to, laugh with, and if you're a player, be inspired by. And with songs like Go and Milk Your Own Cow, it's nigh-on musical stand-up. This fits Blues Matters' modern urban blues template to a tee. All hail Michael Rubin.

ROY BAINTON

is even more pronounced on the Little Richard on speed approach of Be My Lonesome. These guys have a mission to reinstate the traditional blues though, or at least their take on it, as with the down-home Easy On The Eyes, drawing somewhat from Howling Wolf, or the Johnny 'Guitar' Watson inspired I Let Someone In. Singer/ guitarist Pat Faherty, guitarist Matt Stubbs and drummer Tim Carman make as rough and ready a blues sound as such a line-up might suggest, it's a joyful noise!

NORMAN DARWEN

SAMBA TOURÉ
BINGA

GLITTERBOX RECORDS

The blues as we (think) we know it has deep, sometimes hidden and unbreakable roots which stretch like a jugular vein across the seabed of the Atlantic back to the beating heart of Africa. The Songhai people are an ethnic group in West Africa who speak the various Songhai languages. Their language and history have their roots in the Songhai Empire which dominated the western Sahel in the 15th and 16th century. During the 15th and 16th centuries the Songhoy people ruled the largest empire in Africa. It stretched across the continent, and its glory was Timbuktu. People called Timbuktu the city of gold, known universally as a centre of culture and learning. In this stirring, beautifully recorded album, each track is a steppingstone through that rich heritage. Guitars, vocals and backing vocals are all by Touré himself, with atmospheric accompaniment on some tracks by Djimé Sissolo on ngonis, and Souleymane Kane on calabash. This album is a lament by guitarist and singer Samba Touré who grew up in Binga, the region that encompasses the vast space below the Saharan desert in Mali. These are songs of social and political comment, such as Atahar, a cry of anger against all the reasons Mali's schools don't function. Sambalama is a positive song in the face of everything the world throws at Binga, Cola Cissé is dedicated to the great man who contributed so much to the development of football in Mali. Terey Kongo is a river trip, where from the boat the singer admires the beauty of Malian women. Mesmerizing, haunting, this is music without embellishment, the very essence of Songhoy, and a stark historical reminder of where the mystery of the blues began. Put this on your shelves between John Lee Hooker and Son House and you'll not go wrong. Highly impressive stuff.

ROY BAINTON

JOSE RAMIREZ
MAOR LEAGUE BLUES

DELMARK RECORDS

Jose Ramirez is from Costa Rica and is the first Latin American artist to sign with Delmark and has already played with the likes of Buddy Guy, Anson Funderburgh, Janiva Magness, Mark Hummel and more. Opening track Major League Blues is a Chicago blues shuffle featuring Ramirez paying tribute to some of his heroes as mentioned above and trading licks deliciously with special guest 93-year-old Jimmy Johnson. I Saw It Coming is a slow blues featuring excellent vocals from Ramirez and sparkling Hammond B3 organ from Roosevelt Purifoy. The first of two covers here is Eddie Taylor's classic romp Bad Boy with Ramirez duelling on guitar with guest Billy Flynn. Magic Sam's atmospheric slow burner My Love Is Your Love proves to be the perfect showcase for Ramirez' brooding guitar and passionate vocals. These first four tracks are credited to The Delmark All-Star Band which includes 90year old Bob Stroger's superb bass playing. Whatever She Wants is a soul-blues ballad featuring aching vocals and stinging guitar work. Here In The Delta is a hot steaming mess cooked up by Andre Reyes Jr.'s swampy Hammond organ and Ramirez' shimmering guitar work. Forbidden Funk features nifty fretwork and then the Latin feel is fully realised with Are We Really Different which has echoes of Santana. Clearly the years

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CERI JUSTICE
WALK IN SHADOW

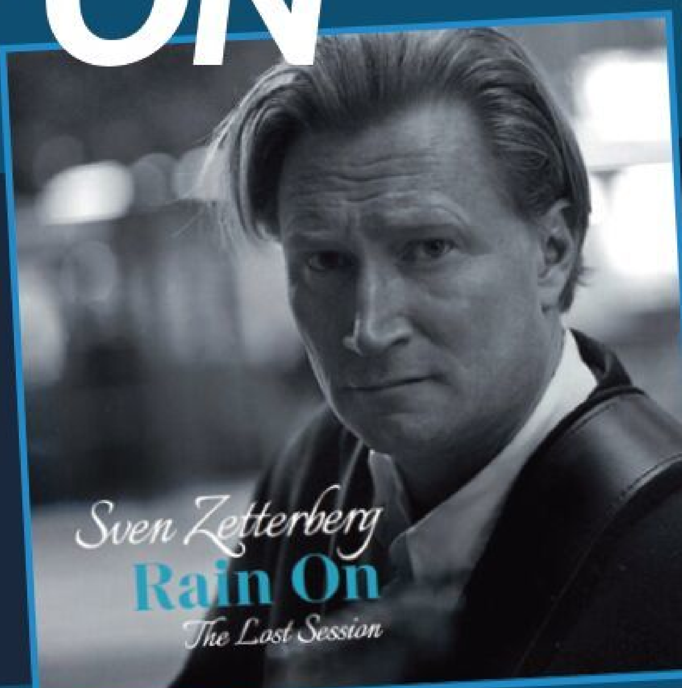
Independent

As her surname suggests, there is a fine balance of songwriting and performance that tips the scales in Ceri Justice's favour on her latest album Walk In Shadow. This Birmingham songstress takes up, from where her debut release Justified left off, the slack of the pandemic with a tight blend of country-rock-blues tunes. She has even thrown in a delightful middle of the road cover of Eddie And The Hots Rods' Do Anything You Wanna Do, which is exactly what she does on this charming release. Powering up these dozen ditties, opener Wanted soars on an ascending guitar riff as Ceri's Stevie Nicks infused vocal glides beautifully over the band and strings arrangement. Aided by producer Paul Johnston, who plays all the instruments except the strings, Justice has the perfect foil to joust with especially on the atmospheric The Creek and the radio-friendly chug and tug on Now I See.

"the soft rock bluesy feel at which she excels"

A rockier up-tempo, with weaving violin, to Dolly Parton's mournful plea to a love rival turns Jolene into a country-blues-rock classic. In doing so, Justice also succeeds in the mantra of doing a cover version different to the original. You Did What You Did continues the soft rock bluesy feel at which she excels as she does on the ballad Got This Feeling where her purring voice comes to the fore. Further atmospheric tones rain down on Thunder where again Justice's voice uncannily draws comparisons to Stevie Nicks, which is no bad thing. However, that would also be doing her an injustice as she holds her own ground as a vocalist after all, is there any artist who doesn't assimilate their accumulated influences in one way or another. Feeling the call of her ancestors, the title track Walk In Shadow has an enchanting Gaelic folk flavour. With Its epic sweep of instrumentation and lyrics, Ceri explores her Irish heritage where her antecedents built Duarrigle Castle in the early 1800s. This album finds Ceri constructing her own castle of sound on this impressive release.

PAUL DAVIES

SVEN ZETTERBERG
"RAIN ON"
OUT NOW


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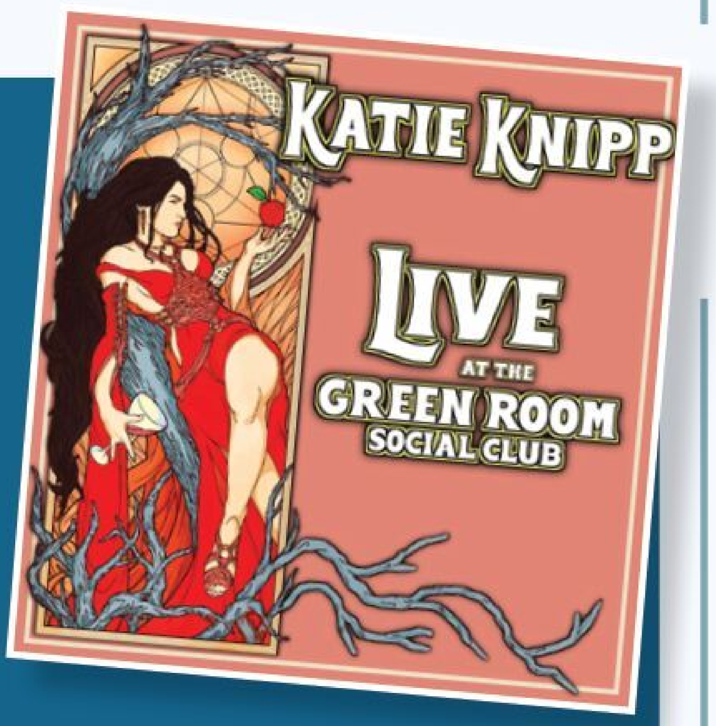

KATIE KNIPP

LIVE AT THE GREEN ROOM SOCIAL CLUB

Independent

Blues Matters was honored to be given first global listen and we weren't disappointed. Katie has one of the most recognizable voices in today's Blues Americana and she delivers huge on this splendidly recorded album from Placerville, California's, Green Room Social Club. Pour yourself a cold one, kick back, turn it up and let Katie take you on a 12-track road trip with her take on the blues from Highways 101 to 61. This is the real deal Katie, brash and unruly, belting out originals from six previous releases as the band delivers in stereo-hi-fi tightly behind her. Intro, Ya Make It So Hard To Sing The Blues and if it isn't for that guy who slipped the ring on her finger then I don't know what. Katie's Dobro slides us into Parade Of Pain on a slow beat by drummer, Neil Campisano, Zac Proteau's smooth bass line and Otis Mourning on sax while Katie vents unrestrained on some well deserving chump.

"extraordinary vocals with lyrics that comfort or cut like a knife"

Gone To Town opens with Katie's piano and torch singer emotions, but allows Chris Martinez to show off his smooth blues Stratocaster licks. Bluebird Street, a sweet ballad from way back when, mellow and heartfelt with sax, guitar and keys, just wow. Pour Another Round for Katie's piano journey into Toussaint's NOLA for charming vocals and clarinet all so perfectly mixed. Better Me takes us hypnotically away on slide Dobro, guitar tremolo, and vocal honesty. Go country roadhouse dancing during Release Me then a change of pace on I Don't Sing For You as she tears some asshole a new one. There's religion of a personal sort during Gospel Of Good Intentions. Through Delta deep slide and lusty insanity Katie cries out on Come Back paired with electric strings love licks. Chill among keys, harp, a laidback guitar and saxophone sweet during Quiet Hell. Fini, Chamomile And Cocaine and we're hooked on extraordinary vocals with lyrics that comfort or cut like a knife, all carrying melodies that linger.

DARRELL SAGE

of jamming and touring have paid off and this album finds Ramirez up there in the big league with the major players. The heartfelt bluesy ballad Gotta Let You Go simmers emotionally as Ramirez expresses the pain and haunting memories felt at the end of a relationship. This fine album closes with Shelly Bonet adding her fiery vocals to After All This Time a soul-blues fuelled by fine Hammond from Andre Reyes Jr. This fine offering of Chicago blues is served up with skill, energy, panache and enthusiasm.

DAVE DRURY

RINGHOLD

KAEV

M.K.D.K RECORDS

This is one of those albums that really tests you as a writer. To say it's way out there is an understatement. Kalle Tikas plays electric guitar and Elenora Kampe provides the vocals. The opening track, The Latest News, starts in an avant-garde way before twisting and turning every which way until you find where the blues are. It is mainly from the guitar, a definite lurch towards the delta can be heard. The vocals tend to be dark and melancholy, a theme that runs throughout the album. Extinction Funk has a more traditional blues feel, especially musically. The guitar playing of Kalle Tikas reminds me somewhat of Ry Cooder with its funky groove and increasing tempo. Lost Kind Words delves deep into the macabre, dark underworld of gothic proportions. It can be said that true blues lyrics are dark and brooding with a sense of loss and forebodement. But this is on another level entirely. Even the most down at heel unlucky blues artist would struggle to be so bereft of life and hope, but these lyrics are dark for a reason. The album then turns into a weird backdrop that doesn't quite make sense, yet you are compelled to keep listening because you feel that there is a story so deeply hidden, it will manifest itself at any given moment. Peter Green has had an effect on the guitar playing, you can get a feel of that, but when the lyrics are sung in Estonian, you wonder why, as it could have turned into something meaningful. This album will not appeal to the mainstream blues audience, although it has blues roots, albeit sometimes buried. However, after listening to it, maybe that's the appeal of the album. You need to think way outside the conventional box, it can suit a multitude of moods. Be bold.

STEPHEN HARRISON

KENNY NEAL

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

RUF RECORDS

This is the first release Kenny Neal has made at Brookstown Recording Studios and is full of the Louisiana blues and soul he is renowned for. He is joined by Darnell Neal on bass guitar, Brandon Adams on Hammond Organ and a plethora of special guests including the Doopsie family, Tito Jackson, and Christone Kingfish Ingram on this uniquely stunning release, which is so joyful, and sentiments match the title. Blues Keeps Chasing Me opens with wonderful horn section then guitar solo, a homage to Lucky Peterson, Arnet Hayes on piano. Mount Up On The Wings Of The King, features Kingfish an apt tribute to BB King. Albert King's I'll Play The Blues For You, is given special treatment next, sung with pure passion by Kenny. Two Timing features Tito Jackson's sweet vocals and Syreeta Neal on backing vocals, a big band sound with a bluesy feel. Louise Ana is pure New Orleans cool, so laid back full of sweet accordion tones by Big Nate Williams. It Don't Cost Nothing, is about sharing love for each other. Bon Temps Rouler is about having fun on the Bayou a major floor filler. It's Been So Long, was written by his father Raul a slow tune. Someone Somewhere, is real Louisiana deal, a song for his father, a Junior Parker number. I've Got To Tell Somebody is about a mistreating woman. The final song, New Orleans is full of that vibe. Astounding musicianship, great lyrics superb songs, a treat.

COLIN CAMPBELL

KATIE SPENCER

THE EDGE OF THE LAND

LIGHTSHIP RECORDS

This is the second album release from Katie Spencer which highlights her stripped back approach to folk music. She has a clear haunting vocal style and accompanies herself with some classy and technical acoustic guitar, at times reminiscent of some of the 1970's song-writing greats like James Taylor and Joni Mitchell albeit she was raised in the North East of England and uses this geographical area as the basis for the majority of her material. While this is fundamentally a solo album Katie does have some background support which includes Tom Mason on double bass and Nathan Bray on Flugelhorn, who gets a lead role on Silence on the Hillside which is a beautiful song. The Flugelhorn providing some haunting interludes that builds it into a very atmospheric song. All the material comes across as downbeat although there is nothing particularly gloomy about most of the songs content, it is just the way Katie delivers her material which is not too dissimilar to her main inspiration when she was young, namely the late great John Martyn. The album was recorded live in the studio over a two-day period and has an exemplary production that allows the listener to pick out every note and breath with clarity, the musicianship is at the top of the scale and on this evidence the English Folk scene has a young artist that it can be rightly proud of, while there is not a hint of Blues this is a very accomplished Folk artist, one of her songs is titled Sweet and Gentle which are the perfect words to describe this release.

ADRIAN BLACKLEE

RUZZ GUITAR'S BLUES REVUE

LIVE! AGAINST THE GRAIN

RG RECORDS

The Ruzz Guitar's Blues Review are based in Bristol. They have had a series of live releases. This was recorded in Frome in UK at The Cheese And Grain venue. Thirteen tracks of upbeat danceable toe tapping rhythm-based tunes. Ruzz is a consummate front man, and this release captures the band's first post pandemic concert. This is what music attendees have been missing, live full big band sound; thirteen songs of maximum enjoyment and great musicianship. The connection with the audience runs throughout this performance, it is energetic no nonsense big band blues at its absolute best. This captures the mood of a band wanting to entertain again.

VANEESE THOMAS

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

Blue Heart Records

A dozen recordings of outstanding quality. If you're wondering who Memphis-born Vaneese Thomas is, she's Memphis Royalty, the daughter of the legendary Rufus Thomas, the talented and colourful musician and entertainer whose career spanned Vaudeville plus fifty years in R&B recording and radio. The rest of the family is no less impressive, star performers Memphis Queen includes Carla Thomas and the popular keyboard player Marvell Thomas. Such a remarkable musical legacy, R&B, gospel, blues, and jazz produces great soul records, and this is one of them. This sound is what Memphis is all about. Just listen to the powerful drive of her composition I'm Movin' On and bask in the sheer soul of the emotional Time to Go Home, with her strident, powerful piano accompaniment.

> *"This is high-octane musical artistry"*

The title track, Fight the Good Fight, includes some fine violin by Katie Jacoby. Things get bluesy with the atmospheric When I've Had a Few. The blues rocks on with the rugged track Bad Man, featuring some stabbing, gritty guitar by Al Orlo, a song with a knock-out middle eight punch of chords. All through this album what impresses is the sheer versatile power of Vaneese's soulful voice. It becomes hardly surprising to discover that she's worked in the past with producer Phil Ramone and has sung with some truly big global names including Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Clapton, Sting and no less than Luciano Pavarotti. This is high-octane musical artistry and once you've played this CD, you'll know what quality is. As commentator Bill Dahl has it, "You'll understand why once you hear it."

ROY BAINTON

They come out of the traps and hit the audience with an energetic version of Hold It, brass section particularly good here then Ruzz mixes in his guitar and away we go. Baby Please Come Home is given the treatment, some mean vocals here. Movin' On is an original full of great tempo and verve. Woke Up this Morning has intricated guitar playing again with full sound. Wonderful World is played by Ruzz on his guitar, a great version he even broke a nail during this rendition. Soulful Blues is another superbly crafted instrumental. It's Been A Long Time is a poignant song in the swing style. Longing To See You is a seductive instrumental and those horns add another dimension. Spag Mambo is a dancefloor favourite. Mama Talk To Your Daughter ends this highly infectious live release, must catch them when you can, quality tunes, brilliant release.

COLIN CAMPBELL

DUKE ROBILLARD BAND

THEY CALLED IT RHYTHM & BLUES

STONY PLAIN

On a list of guitar greats Duke Robillard must be right at the top, for his skill and versatility and for his long and distinguished career. Founder of Roomful Of Blues, replacing Jimmie Vaughan in The Fabulous Thunderbirds, playing with Bob Dylan and fronting his own band, Duke has done it all, making many great albums that have covered all manner of blues styles. His latest is one of his best as he revisits tunes from the height of the R&B era, supported by his regular band and several high-profile guests. Vocalist Chris Cote is a great addition to the band and sings six on this set, Duke sings on three and there are several vocal guest spots: Kim Wilson reprises his 'answer song' to Guitar Slim, The Things I Forgot To Do, on which Duke excels, and Tell Me Why, a frantic rocker fuelled by piano and harp; Sugar Ray Norcia plays harp/vocal on the stop-start She's My Baby and Tampa Red's Rambler Blues; John Hammond strips things back to a more acoustic sound on two tracks and Michelle Wilson adds her sassy vocals to Champagne Mind and a stunning version of Trouble In Mind. The generously filled album runs to over an hour and there are no weak tracks, but highlights must include the grammatically suspect Here I'm Is with a commanding Chris Cote vocal and superb accompaniment from Duke and the band, especially Bruce Bears on piano and Doug James, a pumping Wee Wee Hours, again with Cote, and a great re-make of Mickey and Sylvia's 1956 hit No Good Lover featuring Sue Foley and Duke sharing the vocals. Sue also appears on the closing instrumental Swingin' For Four Bills which celebrates the music of Bills Doggett, Jennings, Butler and Davis, alongside fellow Texan Mike Flanigin on organ. Add in some Freddie King, Roy Milton and Zuzu Bollin and you have a wonderfully varied disc that demonstrates just why Duke Robillard is a master guitarist. Superb album, buy without hesitation!

JOHN MITCHELL

JOHN VILLIERS

PERPETUAL MOTION

INTO THE RED RECORDS

John Villiers releases his fourth album of the outbreak with another selection of fine material, bringing his diverse range of influences from folk, country and blues into an intriguing set of songs. The twelve original songs on Perpetual Motion displays his nimble guitar playing and expressive song writing to great Effect. Finger picking guitar opens the upbeat bouncing tempo of Drive (I Believe) The busy percussion is complimented with gentle guitar on this country Latin flavoured good toe-tapping opener. Wild Women follows, a tale of losing his women told over a soundtrack with a Country and Western feel. Next up is the reflective blues of Where Do They Go, fine percussion and guitar riffs are joined by some emotive piano playing. A highlight for me is Borrowed Time, an excellent bass line and grooving guitar work lay down the rhythm, for Norm Boyd on Harmonica and Peter Terry on piano to drive this enjoyable toe tapping jaunty blues along nicely. The Consequence Of Speed features some more fine percussion with Tom Cambata on congas and good guitar and slide from Villiers. Mr Wolf is a twist on the big bad wolf tales, this will have you up and dancing with a great rhythm and excellent slide work another highlight. Won't B Blue, a toe-tapping country blues, next the congas lay down a grooving rhythm with the maracas supplying a nice depth, while Villiers adds some understated gui-

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MARTIN BURCH BAND

DO NOT GO GENTLE

Unpleasant Pheasant Records

They like to keep all things blues-rock heavy and steady in some parts of Leicestershire – steady beats, meaty riffs, heavy guitar. The Martin Burch Band are a powerful Leicestershire trio including the scarily named Martin Piranha on Vocals and bass, Dave Rowe drums and backing vocals, and Martin Burch guitars and backing vocals. There are just four tracks on this CD recorded at Superfly Studios at Ollerton in Nottinghamshire. There's not a lot of light and shade, but if you like your blues-rock driven by substantial, fat guitar riffs, then this'll shake off the dandruff.

> *"Burch really knows his way around the power chords"*

Three of these numbers were written by Burch himself and Stop Breaking Down by R. Johnson. The Martin Burch band sound like a good, raucous night out in a pub with solid walls and no hanging pictures. Burch really knows his way around the power chords but some of these compositions would benefit from and inventive middle eight. Piranha's vocals are gritty and bite hard, making the overall sound of this confident trio a musical bulldozer, so it would be interesting to hear what other blues stylings they may have in their armory. Good to know though that we still have tight, determined units like this treading the boards.

ROY BAINTON

BLUE TOUCH
"THE MUSIC OF ROBERT JOHNSON"
OUT NOW

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SVEN ZETTERBERG

PAMAPROAUDIO

Sven Zetterberg was truly Scandinavian blues royalty. Sadly, he passed a few years ago in 2016, a blow to the European blues world where the shockwaves still rumble to this day. This posthumous release, 'Rain On" is absolutely fabulous. Recorded in 1999, but never released - for reasons that seem utterly bewildering with the benefit of hindsight - the album falls firmly into the camp of 'better late than never.' Rediscovered, unearthed from old master tapes at the Scandinavian recording studio, by Katri Oksanen, his partner and producer here, put together, mixed, mastered and launched on March 28th, which would have been his 70th birthday, this is a great album that is easily one of the best releases of the year. Indeed, it could be of almost any year; it's really that good. Tracks range across a variety of electric-blues fields always pushed over the line by Zetterberg's cool vocal delivery and fretwork mastery; soulful, sensitive, slide-driven at times and always totally blues-drenched. Kim Wilson adds his harp-mastery to the project. The easiest way to possibly describe this release is by saying it's from a guy who was a blues purist, understood, engaged with and embraced the genre with an astonishing talent and facility. Sven Zetterberg was that rare creature, he was the blues in a Nordic nutshell and this 11-track album is the perfect introduction to his wonderful lasting legacy and body of blues work.

IAIN PATIENCE

IMAGE: Pelle Piano

tar on the enjoyable Keep It In Mind, a grooving rhythm keeps a nice pace with the harp and guitar working well together on the mid tempo blues Bingo. Closing the album with A Picture Of You, Villiers paints an emotive tale of what could have been on this county flavoured ballad, an interesting and very enjoyable album.

SHIRL

MALONE SIBUN

ASHES TO DUST

REDLINE MUSIC

At only four tracks' Ashes to Dust is a fine introductory EP to the collaborative talents of Marcus Malone and Innes Sibun. Both have successful careers, but the four tracks on this release show the incendiary talent the duo release in the studio. With an all-star band of Kevin O'Rourke on Drums, bassist Roger Innis and Tim Blackmore and Moz Gamble on Keyboards, this is an album of high energy blues, rock and soul. The opening track, Makin' It shows the influence of jump jive blues, with Sibun working his Wah-Wah pedal and fingers to great effect, with the rest of the band ably keeping up. The title track, Ashes to Dust is a slower piece but is a still an effective showcase, and the only cover, Willie Dixon's Evil is a great version, full of swagger, musical twists, and some dynamic playing from Kevin O'Rourke, and some interesting keyboard, whilst the guitar solo comes right out of the speakers and grabs the listener by the ears. Innes Sibun is a great guitarist, technically accomplished, but with plenty of interesting ideas, and shifts in lyrical phrasing and emphasis. Marcus Malone is also in fine form throughout, with a voice that takes in rock, blues and jazz equally, but also rhythmically adds a lot to the mix. Ashes to Dust finishes with the slower, banjo and slide guitar drenched Restless Heart, showing great understanding between all the players, in a song that serves as a musical palate cleanser, and shows that this duo know what they are doing with a far quieter, far more reflective piece. Hopefully, the release of this EP might lead to a full album. I will be looking out for it if it does.

BEN MACNAIR

GREIG TAYLOR BAND

BORN TO LOVE YOU

INDEPENDENT

Greig Taylor is a diligent Scottish singer songwriter, ever evolving his music that is usually rooted in blues. Here he has brought out a stunning new four track E.P. He also has a new band, they include Dave Cantwell on drums, Brian McFie on lead guitar, Nelson McFarlane on bass guitar and on keyboards there is Dave Cowan. Together they are a mixture of talents each having been in differing genre bands. Four tracks of differing music styles start with the title track Born To Love You. There is the bonus of this being a duet between Greig and Earl Thomas. This was very much a Transatlantic effort as they did not sing the parts together although it does sound that way. They sent mp3 files to each other and mixed the song at The Studio in Glasgow. The result is a rocking blues number with catchy chorus, horn section and a groove that hits the listener full on and never stops. The two vocalists' voices blend well on this upbeat tune. Next is I Should've Known, a mellower funky vibe to this one, Greig reminiscing about lost love, superb keyboard playing underrides the tune. Other two tracks are recorded live: Crucifixion Blues a real Texas strut to this one. Last track, Tears In My Beer is just a superb song, lyrics so poignant and vocals are spine chilling. This song epitomizes what feeling a song means. Superb mix of tunes by a tight musical combo.

COLIN CAMPBELL

SISTER COOKIE

IN THE BLUE CORNER

THE LIQUID LABEL

This is one of those albums that you feel you should have heard a long time ago. What I mean to say is, this album grabbed me from the first thundering drum beat that introduces the opening track, Can't Get It When You Want It. Sister Cookie then bursts onto the scene with vocals that are surely a gift from the gods. After just one track I'm in love with this album already. Each song is a mixture of blues, jump, and swing, all joining together in a musical melting pot. Crucify, shows Sister Cookie in all her shining glory, alongside a wonderful set of musicians. It's easy to tell that they all love playing these songs. There is a ferocity about the playing that you seldom get these days. Nothing Left To Do But Cry, slows the pace down after the first four numbers. A sultry blues song that oozes class from Sister Cookie. Alex Bland brings his Saxophone skills to the fore here, sweet Sax, bluesy lyrics, what more could you ask for from a song. Ain't No Good (But It's Good Enough For Me) takes us back to the jump, swing blues of earlier tracks. It's such a get up and shake what your mamma gave you type of tune. All to seldom you get an album where each and every track is a gem. That's what makes In The Blue Corner an early contender for album of the year. The album finishes with The Sins Of The Father. I cannot recall enjoying an album as much as I've enjoyed this for a very long time. My biggest hope is that Sister Cookie and her band play some live gigs very soon. This album needs an audience. A fantastic album in every sense of the word.

STEPHEN HARRISON

LOUISIANA RED & BOB CORRITORE

TELL ME 'BOUT IT

VIZZTONE

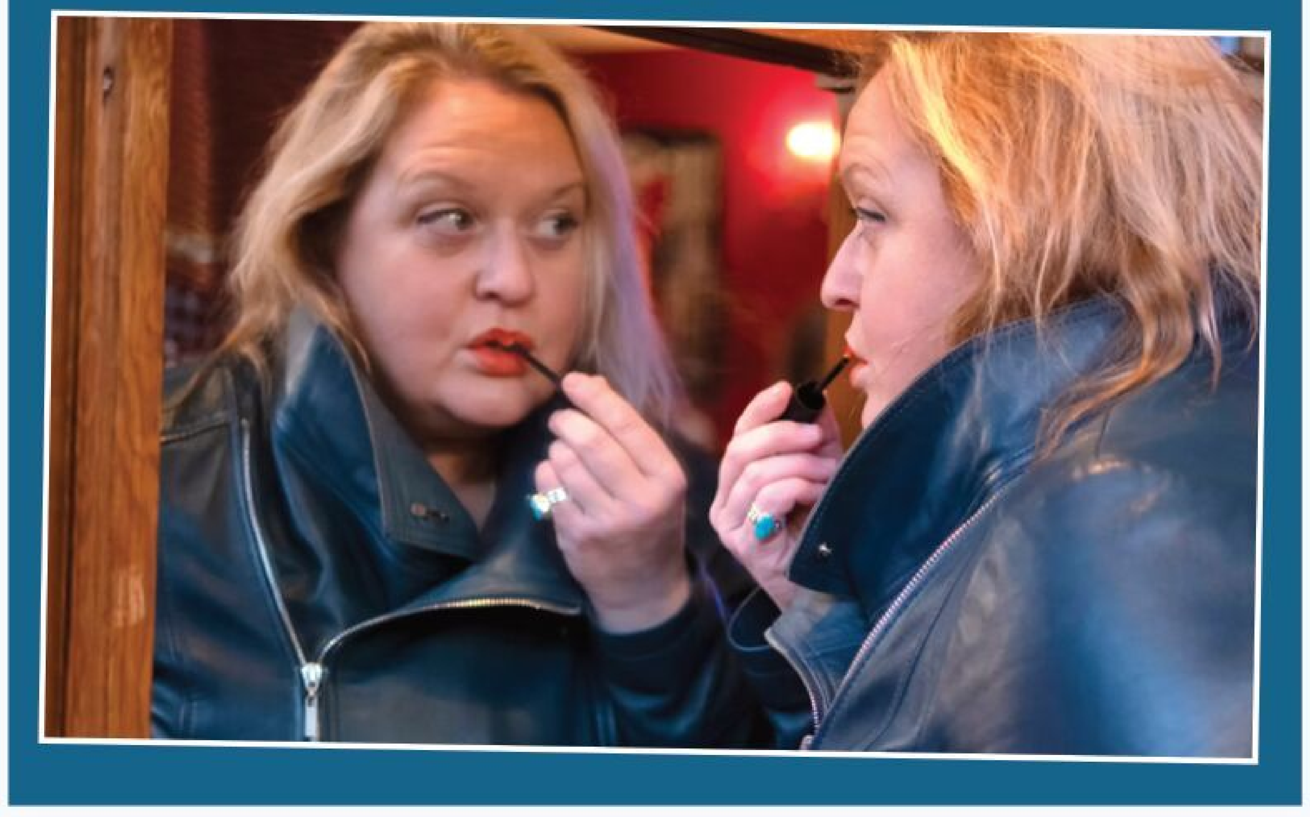
Singer/ guitarist Louisiana Red and harmonica ace Bob Corritore first played together at The Delta Fish Market in Chicago in 1981. When Bob moved to Phoenix, Arizona the following year, Red soon followed, before settling in Germany. Red started returning to the USA in 2000 though, meeting up with his old friend, and these eleven songs come from seven different sessions, laid down between 2000 and 2009, only four tracks have been issued previously. Red died in 2012, but Bob still champions the blues down in Arizona. Red was a true bluesman; he truly lived the blues. Having met him numerous times in the late 70s and 80s, I can say he hardly ever stopped playing, literally. I clearly recall Red playing for a small group in his tiny dressing room at London's 100 Club throughout the

EMMA WILSON
WISH HER WELL

Independent

Listening to Emma Wilson takes me back to a time before auto-tune and before digital manipulation of music. Before music was written by computer and to a time when a great song, sung by a vocalist who actually felt the emotions in the song, could stir emotions in the listener. And she manages to make it sound as up to date as tomorrow – some class act. Emma Wilson wrote, either with Mark Neary or on her own, every track on this album, and everyone sounds instantly classic, instantly recognizable but also completely new. She has a voice that really is perfect for soul or jazz and she has a range that is really remarkable whether she is singing in a high pop register or a sultry and sassy, dark and smoky tone. She also has a band around her with the chops to put over the songs perfectly. Mark Neary (bass) is fresh from playing with Noel Gallagher, drummer Mat Hector was most recently working with Iggy Pop, guitar player Adam Chetwood has been seen playing with Mark Ronson and Imelda May and Alessandro Brunetta plays harp on one track. Musically, this takes me right back to the soul wars where Motown and Stax were throwing down on the opposite sides of the USA and the music straddles both forms in an ultimate soul style. Listening to the album I found my favourites changing almost every time but a few numbers really do hit the spot, Rack Em Up is a superb bit of funk with a hard edge and a fine guitar solo, Little Love Bite seduces you with a soft soul feel and the rocky Blues of Not Paying featuring Alessandro Brunetta and a stunning vocal from Ms Wilson. The album title track, Wish Her Well, really had shivers going up and down my back, a swampy, Bayou feel, really dark and vicious emotions, great thumping monotone drum and sinuous guitar lines. A top bit of modern soul, very grown-up and miles ahead of so much of the current 'R&B' crop.

ANDY SNIPPER



intermission, and he told me a couple of times how he had an ear-piece he could plug into his guitar so as not to disturb his neighbours when he got home from gigs. Red played and sang whatever came into his mind. On opener Mary Dee Shuffle, he virtually gives the listener his old address in New Jersey; musically he drew on Muddy Waters, Elmore James, John Lee Hooker and others he associated with; Bob knows just what these songs require too. This is a masterclass in the traditional blues. Over the course of these tracks, Red and Bob have such high quality accompanists as Bob Margolin and Buddy Reed, pianist Dave Maxwell and drummer Chico Chism, and numerous others. If you want the pure blues, don't go no further. A strong contender for album of the year.

NORMAN DARWEN

KAZ HAWKINS
MY LIFE AND I

DIXIE FROG RECORDS

Well, what do we have here? We all know Kaz, one of those blues artists with an extraordinary history, talent and career that is guaranteed to make people sit up and take notice. Add a genuinely wonderful, powerful, soul-drenched voice, and you have yet another blues-soul artist that can be added to any North Ireland blues hall of fame, where she can sit comfortably alongside Rory Gallagher and Van Morrison with considerable ease. Now recently signed to leading French blues label, Dixie Frog Records, Hawkins has turned out 'My Life and I, her debut release with the new label. Hawkins' last release, Memories Of, was fabulous, featuring her growling, sprawling vocal delivery built around the work of one of her personal blues favourites, Etta James, for the most part. With My Life and I, she has moved on, writing much of the material, wearing her heart on her revealing sleeve, playing guitar and again singing with a clear power and passion that should cement her position ever more securely in the European blues world.

IAIN PATIENCE

STEVE ELLIS
FINCHLEY BOY

SONY RECORDS

Steve Ellis is guy with a voice. Believe me, this is a guy who can rattle through the genres with a strength and power that makes you sit up, pinch yourself and wonder just why you haven't heard of him before. But, if you're of a certain age, you most likely have heard him. In the sixties, when the music world was exploding into life, Ellis, from north London, was a frontman with Top of the Pops, hit-parade topping band, Love Affair. Few won't have heard him sing over the decades with one particular number, 'Everlasting Love', remaining one of those absolutely essential songs of the sixties. But Ellis could all too easily have sloped off, resting on those well-deserved laurels. Instead, he continued writing, playing, recording as times and musical tastes changed. In recent years, Ellis has turned his hand to recording and writing with the likes of Roger Daltry and Paul Weller. And now, with this extraordinary and excellent ten-disc boxed CD set from 'Sony, a career-spanning release, his talent again shines brightly, demanding and commanding in equal measure. Anyone who reckons Rod Stewart's take on 'Handbags & Gladrags' is cool, should simply shuffle that from the deck and listen to Steve Ellis totally tearing it up with a towering vocal

MARTIN BURCH BAND
"DO NOT GO GENTLE"
NEW EP
OUT NOW

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INA FORSMAN
ALL THERE IS

Jazzhaus Records

High flying Finn Ina Forsman returns with her new album 'All There Is'. For her latest offering the soulful songstress wanted to put forward a sound that she deemed Cinematic Soul. Perhaps the kind of music that would work as a movie score. By doing so, Forsman has found her musical home. The top of the album, "Love Me", and the lively sounds of "Don't Lose Today" are real earworms. You can't stop yourself from immediately taking a second listen. Whilst "All There Is" is the kind of song you would perhaps expect to hear in an elegant piano bar. Ina's voice is as smooth as silk. Throughout the album, there is a real timeless quality to Forsman's compositions and delivery. They sound like they could have been recorded during another era – in a good way. Ina's poetic lyricism shines through during heartfelt love songs such as the beautiful "One Night In Berlin" and "Promises". The latter perfectly encapsulates the kind of cinematic quality that the artist set out to achieve with her latest release. Furthermore, the big band sounds of "Dive", with its wonderful orchestral elements, deserve to be performed in the grandest of concert halls. In the final stages of the album, the infectious sounds of both "Raw Honey" and "April Song" are not only highlights, but they make the listener want to get up and dance. 'All There Is' was recorded in two locations, and each recording session showcases a different side of the artist. From brooding ballads to uplifting soulful blues classics, the album has it all. With Forsman's latest offering, she proves that she can traverse musical styles and genres with ease.

ADAM KENNEDY

PIERCE DIPNER
"GOIN' BACK"
OUT NOW

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delivery and purposeful, passionate performance here. Me, I love it. This is great music, guaranteed to satisfy and get you on your feet dancing again!

IAIN PATIENCE

BIG AL AND THE HEAVY-WEIGHTS

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

VIZZTONE RECORDS

Big Al and The Heavy-weights have released six albums since 1998 with Love One Another being their latest offering. Recorded at Suite Mix Studios in Slidel, Louisiana with George Curreann on producer duties alongside the band. The title track opener features Luther Dickinson (North Mississippi Allstars) and harmonica player Jason Ricci. An upbeat number let's Big Al Lauro lay down a solid beat surrounded by a tight electric guitar solo from Dickinson. Wayne Lohr tickles the ivories on I Need A Fix but with lines like "I see a lady walking I need a taste" it jars a bit even if it just means a kiss. The lively Tchoupitoulas is a standout with the full band sound and complements the powerful Guardian Angel which includes Dana Abbot on background vocals. The southern rock tone on Alright With Me sounds like the 2005 Jace Everett hit Bad Things at times. I'm Your Man is what I imagine a blues track would sound like. Too Cold ironically has a hot sticky groove. Closer Zydeco Love includes Gina Forsyth on fiddle, and I suspect it will be a live favourite if it is not already. In conclusion, with its fourteen tracks Love One Another is a substantial listen that informs the listener that this is a solid music unit that plays well together.

GLENN SARGEANT

THE NIGHTHAWKS

ESTABLISHED 1972

VIZZTONE

There's nothing quite like that little bump of excitement when a new CD arrives for review. The first thing you see is the cover artwork and, for this album, it brings to mind an old gas station on a dusty backroad. The perfect setting for some exceptional music. Established 1972 is a fitting celebration of 50 years of dedication to the art of the

THE BAD DAY

THE BAD DAY

Crackerjack Records

The Bad Day quickly follows up on their pandemic released debut album with the band's new and somewhat groundbreaking eponymous album. Now, what's so different about The Bad Day's sophomore album, I hear you say. With their latest offering, the group has put forward a blues-rock concept album. And whilst there may be many concept albums in the rock world, when it comes to blues this style of release is few and far between. In recent times only A Blues Man Came Calling by Tommy Castro would fall under a similar banner. The British blue band's latest offering comprises of two parts, each of which is approximately 15 minutes long. Throughout each part of the record, one song seamlessly flows into one another. Perhaps, in a similar manner to Tommy or Quadrophenia by The Who, whilst simultaneously depicting a tragic story of love and freedom set against the overarching concept of a broken society. The album gets underway with the catchy and uplifting blues/rock sounds of Wake Up Caroline.

The album ebbs and flows as The Bad Day takes the listener on a musical journey. Devil's Lullaby also features in the first half. The track was recently voted Track of the Week by Classic Rock Magazine, and deservedly so. The conclusion of Part 1 of the album almost reprises where it started with a few bars of the opening track. On the other hand, Part 2 of the album commences with some up-tempo, funky, blues-rock riffs with a heavy groove via the song, 'When The Cage Comes Down'. In this day and age and with the advent of streaming, music fans consume songs rather than albums.

They pick tracks from playlists rather than listening to an album in full. Perhaps with their concept album approach, The Bad Day has flipped that model on its head by encouraging fans to listen to the album from start to finish. The Bad Day's second album is not only an innovative release, but it's incredibly enjoyable too.

ADAM KENNEDY

CHRIS BADNEWS BARNES

BADNEWS RISING

Vizztone Records

Whenever you see the label Vizztone is involved, one thing is pretty certain – there's gonna be some damn-good blues music in the mix. 'BadNews Rising" certainly confirms this thought, with 12 tracks performed with a tasty toungue-in-cheek, mastery of a rare blues format and genre, Hokum. Widely known as the King of Hokum in the USA, Barnes has pretty much single-handedly resurrected the genre and made it his own. For those unsure of the style, try taking a pinch of Bo Carter (the king of the double-entendre), add a pinch of ribald, raucous humour and a shake of risqué spice – maybe the track, I like Cleavage - and you have a hint of the flavour. In recent years, Barnes – a former US East Coast TV personality, actor and comedy writer and star, has turned his hand increasingly to blues music, with good old Hokum at its core. A few years ago, his 'Live' album, recorded onboard the legendary Blues Cruise, with harp-master, Steve Guyger and guitar great, Gary Hoey, alongside on stage, really opened eyes and ears to his blues talent and understanding. Before that, his '90 Proof Truth' offered more than a hint od just what might be coming down the line. With BadNews Rising, Barnes has stepped onto the stage once again with an album that features his own compositions, songs that sit easily in the canon of modern Hokum while also highlighting his considerable blues talent and ability – always a splash of humour.

IAIN PATIENCE

blues. Mark Wenner, the only remaining original member of the band, heads up this seasoned 4-piece with vocals and harmonica. Another veteran bringing his unique style is Dan Hovey on vocals, guitar, and lap slide guitar. The rhythm section of Mark Stutso on drums and Paul Pisciotta on bass, also add depth and body to the sound with their vocals. The album starts with a nod to Mark Wenner's roots in Rock & Roll with the upbeat No-body. The driving originals Coming and Going and Gas Station Chicken teases with the slightly tongue-in-cheek humour that pops its head up occasionally. The covers of Jimmy Reed's Take It Easy, Mose Allison's Ask Me Nice and Run Red Run from The Coasters show the respect given by the Nighthawks to those who have laid the foundations of the genre. Some songs do meander slightly into other genres, but these are in keeping with the feel of the album. The Nighthawks deserve the honour of being proclaimed "the best bar band in the world" as they are excellent songwriters and performers. This album is well-rounded, well performed, well produced, and well, just extremely enjoyable.

DIANNE DODSWORTH

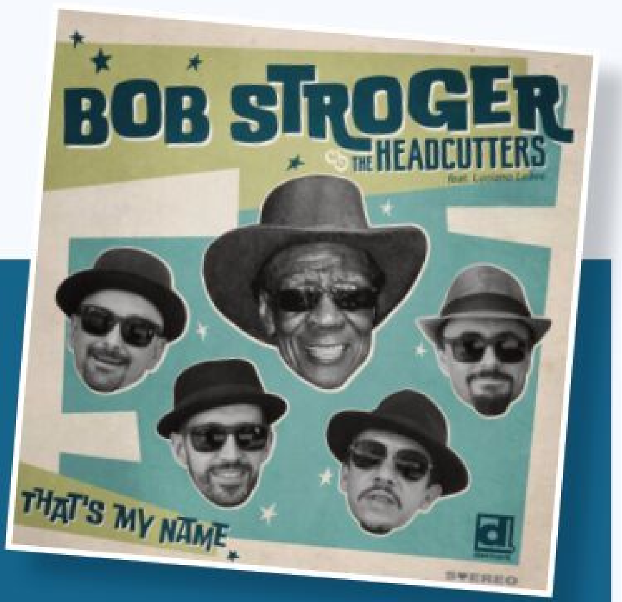
BLACK PEARL
SELF-TITLED
REDLINE MUSIC

Conceived through lockdown this project brings together the considerable skills of Detroit born vocalist supreme Marcus Malone and one time Wishbone Ash guitarist Muddy Manninen. Add the song-writing talents of well-known promoter Pete Feenstra and you have a heady brew of blues rock magnificence. Opening track Angel Town opens gently enough before Muddy weaves wonderful blues motifs around Marcus wistful vocals. The solid rhythm section allows both lead players to shine. It sets a high bar, but the band and material are equal to it. Cheap Perfume has a kinda Stones country feel swagger to it with just enough acoustic flavouring to keep it simmering along. Delivery Man is next and reminded me of prime Little Feat with a lovely Southern vibe underpinning it, in no small way owing to Moz Gamble sprinkling in piano. Price On Love is a gently delivered love song that Marcus makes totally believable with his vocal and Muddy tastefully adds guitar magic dust in all the right places. Luxury Girl mixes it up just enough with a soulful funky feel, while Muddy's guitar always keeps things rooted to bluesy rock. Mexican Romance, of course, has a Southern Latin vibe. I love the way this track winds up with Marcus almost spoken outro and rocky guitar. Moment Of Regret showcases some super blues guitar and the bv's give it an almost gospel feel in places. Natural Light rocks things up a bit, Marcus relishing the opportunity to hit some high notes. Not to be outshone Muddy layers superb guitar breaks and solos. Handmade Pearl I guess is a title track as such, the pace is relaxed, a little funky, a lot soulful with both lead players to the fore at different points. With My Baby By My Side is a tremendous closer, it sounds cool in a very 70's rock way in the way it blends the rock with soul, blues and funk. Big kudos to Pete Feenstra for his lyric writing, always mature and avoiding the cliches often attached to blues rock. I thoroughly enjoy this album every time I listen, it reminds me of underappreciated bands like Cry Of Love and Badlands in places. I hope this isn't a one-off release because this trio, backed by some superb musicians too, seem to have found a winning formula.

STEVE YOURGLIVCH

THE INFAMOUS STRINGDUSTERS
TOWARD THE FRAY
AMERICANA VIBES RECORDS

Bluegrass is a style that fans traditionally associate with fun, a good time, a dance, a smile, a party atmosphere. But with this album, the Infamous Stringdusters manage to take the surface jollity of their genre, and underpin it with the levels of soul-searching and social observation and commentary that are usually resolved for musicians steeped in the blues. For musicians of this calibre, simply peerless instrumentation and production can almost be accepted as a given, but that does not mean they should be underestimated for a moment. The bedrock of the songs on this album is based on the top-level musicianship from all involved. That is the canvas and paints used to create the construction of the songs, to pin down the style firmly and enjoyably at the top end of bluegrass composition. But it's what the band do with the lyrics and delivery that they lovingly apply to their music. It's when you start to pay appropriate and necessary levels of attention to what the band are saying, as well as how they are choosing to say it, that the deep strengths of this album reveal themselves in a highly satisfying collection of observations about the world in which they, and we, live right now. And for songs like I Didn't Know, and Means To An End, they pull no punches at all. That's not to say that this is a miserable or pessimistic album, far from it. In fact, what shines through



BOB STROGER AND THE HEADCUTTERS
THAT'S MY NAME
Delmark Records

Bob Stroger is a musician with blues written through him like a stick of rock. Now at ninety-one, his long and prestigious career sees him releasing an album as bandleader, working with a group of Brazilian musicians. There is nothing whatsoever "Brazilian' about this collection, which is dyed-in-the-wool Chicago blues. As you'd expect from a man who moved with his family to the West Side of the city aged sixteen, to an apartment behind Silvio's Blues Club. The influence of sounds from the club led Bob to take up bass guitar and spend the intervening years carving out a stellar career as one of the most charismatic and sought-after band and session player on the scene. On this collection, Bob's voice utterly belies his physical age, he sings like a man half his age, and his walking bass lines underpin a mixture of classics like CC Rider, with some of his own compositions.

> *"An exploration of the Delmark catalogue is firmly on the 'things to do' list"*

Throughout, the accompanying musicians provide a firm musical base for Bob to prophesy over, and like all the best blues players, they never allow their own obvious dexterity and skill to overshadow the songs, or the vocals. Standout stars are Joe Marhofer on harmonica, and guest Luciano Leaes on piano and Hammond, whose sweetening on top of the sad tales of love loss and betrayal enhance the entire collection. Everyone shifts their game up a division on I'm A Busy Man, the standout cut from a superior collection of Chicago blues music. Mr Marhofer's harmonica weeps and wails offering the instrumental equivalent of a betrayed lover bemoaning his tragic misfortune, while Bob Stroger does the same with is vocal equivalent. And just to top it all off, a guitar solo from Ricardo Maca combines the two with an exercise in blues playing that is almost the exemplar for anyone looking to take up the style. This album is proof that as familiar a format as Chicago blues is, there is still endless opportunities to take it somewhere else, somewhere new, and somewhere worth following. An exploration of the Delmark catalogue is firmly on the 'things to do' list.

ANDY HUGHES

the songs is not only the observation that things are not as they ought to be, but that there is an unshakeable belief in the goodness and perseverance of the human spirit, and that means we will get better, because we must. Of course, if you want to gloss over the lyrical content, a mistake in my view, but an option, because everyone listens to music in their own way, then you can simply enjoy the wonderful solo intervals in the songs that allow band members to showcase their instrumental hops. Thoughtful and joyful in equal measure, a rare skill beautifully executed.

ANDY HUGHES

BOB CORRITORE AND FRIENDS

DOWN HOME BLUES REVUE

VIZZTONE RECORDS

The back story to this collection is fascinating. Harmonica player and producer Bob Corritore fetched up in Phoenix Arizona, started a blues radio show, and opened a blues club, The Rhythm Room. Bob would invite his favourite blues artists in to play a set in the club, and record a studio session, leading to a vast and hugely impressive library of unique blues performances, linked together by Bob's superlative harmonica breaks because he sat in for each and every set. The result of selecting a fine collection of numbers from said sessions is release here on this album. This is the real deal, the cream of blues musicians who made their way down to The Rhythm Room to play a spell and have their work committed to tape for posterity. Songs like the Arthur Crudup classic Mean Old Frisco is given a fabulous workout by veteran blues giant T-Model Ford, adding his version to, well, just about everyone's. Little Walter, Eric Clapton, solo and with Derek And The Dominoes, the list is long. Bob can stand up and blow with the best, his scorching solo on Nothing But Blues matches Henry Townsend's visceral vocal work-out, and Johnny Rapp's equally storming guitar insertion, the combination almost come out of the speakers such is the intensity f their delivery. The blues doesn't do 'stars', everyone simply plays for the songs, but if there was a '; star' here, it would be Robert 'Bilbo' Walker whose pedigree is matchless. Born on a plantation in Clarksdale, Mississippi, his career was as long as it was influential, and his visit to The Rhythm Room in the autumn of his career showed that his voice had not weakened for one second as the years crept on. His rendition of Muddy Waters' Still A Fool is a highlight on a uniformly excellent collection of magical blues cuts. We must hope that Bob Corritore gets the bug for sharing his bottomless collection of legendary blues sessions, and this is the first of very many more albums like this.

ANDY HUGHES

SECRET ALLIANCE

REVELATION

PUNISHMENT 18 RECORDS

Starting initially as a solo project of the Italian guitarist and producer Gianluca Galli (already founder and former of Mantra, Time Machine and Silver Horses to name a few). Revelation is the follow-up to the January 2020 debut album Solar Warden and allows this four-piece to showcase eleven new tracks. Opener Welcome On Planet Earth is a heavy sound framed by Tony Franklin's bass and the punchy drums provided by Ricardo Confessori. I am reminded of bands such as Nightwish and Lacuna Coil on the atmospheric Fire In The Sky as Galli unleashes his slick guitar sound. A highlight on this album is the musical journey of She Is Green with Andrea Ranfa's lead vocal bringing the lyrics to life. The short but sweet Requiem for Technology lets the musician's solo and segues into the Kraftwerk-esque The Arise. Overall, Secret Alliance have limited dealings with the blues genre on Revelation and it sits more in progressive rock territory. However, if you enjoy the work of Black Country Communion then you might want to know more about Secret Alliance.

GLENN SARGEANT

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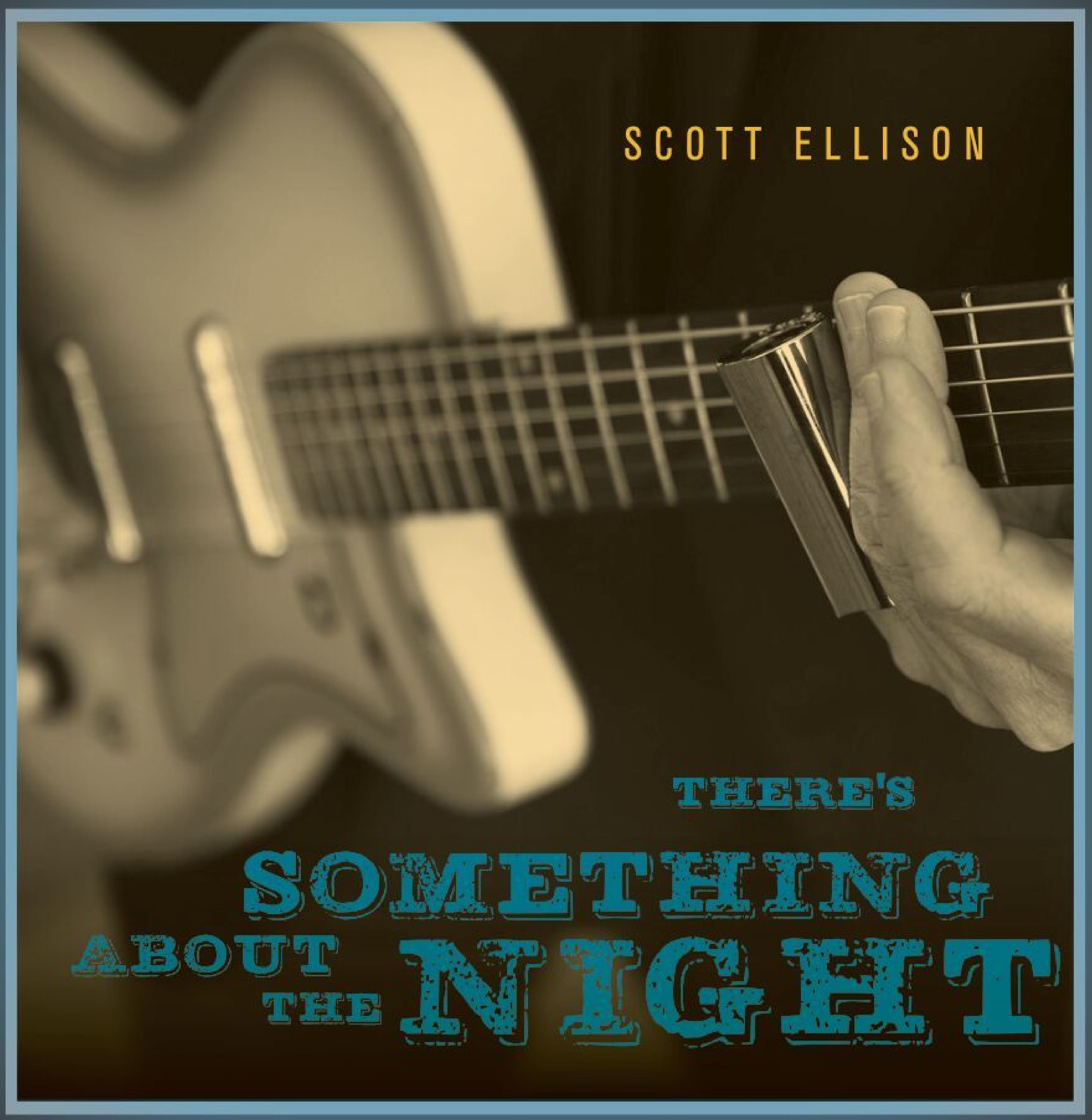

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